

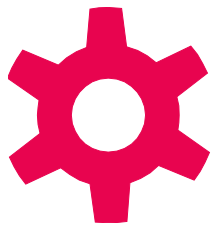
LIVE. WORK. ACHIEVE.

**MISSISSIPPI PARTNERSHIPS FOR EMPLOYMENT
FOR YOUTH WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**



GETTING TO WORK!

Mississippi Partnerships For Employment
Implementation Update
September 2014



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**MISSISSIPPI PARTNERSHIPS FOR EMPLOYMENT
FOR YOUTH WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

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Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Executive Order	7-8
Transition	9
Gathering Grounds	10
Jesse Couret's Story	12-13
Heather Hall's Story	14-15
BOLTS Program	16
The Arc Pilot Project	18
Quintella Proctor's Story	20-21
Facilities and Work Activity Centers	22
Community Services and Supports	25, 30-31
Willie Turnage's Story	26-27
Sapaletto's Story	28-29
Miss. Dept. of Employment Security	31
EmployAbility Job Fair	32
ID/DD Waiver Changes	33
Medicaid State Plan Changes	35
Conclusion	36

Executive Summary

Over the past three years, the Mississippi Partnerships for Employment (MSPE) Project has stimulated significant changes in the state's options and opportunities for employment of youth and young adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

This report highlights people who have achieved their dreams of competitive employment in the community. It shares information about school districts and employment providers who have put new ideas into practice with impressive short-term results, while also building capacity to insure their programs continue. It also describes changes at the local, state and national level that will permanently change the way the systems that serve people with disabilities in Mississippi prioritize and facilitate community employment choices.

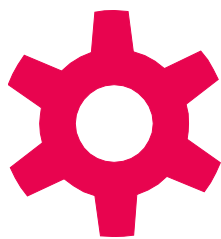
These successes have been made possible because of the collaboration and cooperation among state agencies, individual self-advocates, representatives from a variety of disability advocacy organizations, and many others. This report celebrates these successes by sharing a few stories that illustrate real world results. It also details the many changes being made to ensure similar outcomes for others.

Key accomplishments include:

- Issuance of an Executive Order on Disability Employment Partnerships by Gov. Phil Bryant in January 2014.
- Two school-based pilot projects providing work experience at school which have led to employment in the community for 40 high school youth.
- A pilot project working with schools, employment providers and state funders to ensure that Customized Employment is a viable option.
- Increased collaboration among state disability and employment agencies.
- Raising awareness at all levels about the benefits of supporting competitive employment for people with disabilities.

Our work is not finished, but a strong foundation has been laid for continued successes. We hope readers will support our efforts and share our good news!

-MSPE Employment Work Group



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FOR YOUTH WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

Getting to Work!

Mississippi Partnerships For Employment Implementation Update September 2014

Introduction

In October 2011, Mississippi began a coordinated, far-reaching effort to ensure that its residents with disabilities could get jobs in their communities. Disability advocacy and service agencies, individual self-advocates, and key state agencies committed to a five-year project to achieve fundamental systems changes. They came together to talk, to share, to learn, and to focus their collective energies on the goal of improving competitive, integrated employment outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Mississippi Partnerships for Employment (MSPE), funded by the U.S. Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, was born!

During its first year, MSPE held community forums and quarterly Consortium meetings so all the key stakeholders could get to know each other and share ideas for improving the systems of employment services and supports for people with disabilities in Mississippi. The MSPE managing partners, which includes the executive directors of Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS), the Institute for Disabilities Studies (IDS) at The University of Southern Mississippi, and the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities (MSCDD), received extensive technical assistance from national leaders in the field. In addition, a Stakeholders Group met regularly to focus on innovative strategies and best practices for systems improvement for competitive employment of youth and young adults with IDD.

MSPE's Employment Work Group was charged with researching available resources and funding streams, and documenting barriers to achieving the vision of community-based employment choices and opportunities for all. In September 2012, the Employment Work Group delivered a comprehensive Year One Report to the full Consortium, which selected 10 priorities for the upcoming years of MSPE work from the many recommendations made.

In year two, everyone got to work, acting individually and collectively toward achieving these priorities. And results began to show! By the middle of the second year, it was clear that changes were being made on numerous levels. Agencies were implementing changes that were in sync with the Consortium priorities. Pilot projects were modeling success in secondary school transition programs that can be replicated by others. Collaboration between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), sheltered workshop providers, and school systems set the stage for Customized Employment opportunities for people with the most significant disabilities. Policy makers embraced the cause and pledged support.

In recognition of these strides and achievements, the Employment Work Group chose to make highlighting them as the focus of this, its Second Report. By telling stories and sharing information, it hopes to celebrate what is possible and what should become commonplace for all youth and young adults with disabilities throughout Mississippi.

This report covers October 2012 through August 2014. We offer our deep appreciation to all whose efforts have contributed to this report.

"The President knows that oftentimes individuals at the local and state level are truly 'champions of change' for employment of people with disabilities in their communities." – *White House Disability Update: Celebrating America's Diverse Workforce*, September 5, 2014

Employment First

Overarching Priority: The Consortium will spearhead an effort to get state leaders to commit to an “Employment First” legislative initiative in Mississippi which is backed up by meaningful and concrete changes to laws, policies and practices to maximize employment opportunities for individuals served by Mississippi’s ID/DD system.

✓ Progress – Employment Executive Order

After this priority was set, efforts began immediately to research Employment First models in other states and develop a draft document for the Mississippi Legislature to consider in its 2013 Session. The Mississippi Association of People in Support of Employment First (APSE) agreed to lend its legislative advocacy expertise to the effort. Representative Carolyn Crawford and Senator Terry Burton agreed to sponsor legislation, which was introduced in January 2013. It died in committee. Senator Burton, the MSPE managing partners, and MDRS then re-structured the legislation in the form of a Continuing Resolution which passed the Senate but did not come up for consideration in the House before the deadline. All these experiences laid a great background for continued work in preparation for the 2014 Session.

Informational sessions on Employment First were held throughout the summer of 2013, and the MSPE Managing partners met with key agency heads and the Governor seeking support for a revised proposal, which would repurpose the existing but dormant Disability Resource Commission. Representative Crawford and Senator Burton again agreed to sponsor the bill, and informational cards were sent to all legislators. In addition, Governor Phil Bryant agreed to consider issuing an Executive Order containing many of the same provisions as the proposed legislation.

On January 14, 2014, Governor Bryant issued Executive Order #1335 at a press conference held jointly with MSPE and APSE, and attended by many members of the community. While not using the term “Employment First,” the order adopts the key principle of ensuring that state programs, policies, and

procedures support **“employment in integrated settings as the first priority option, to the extent feasible, for persons with disabilities who are of working age.”** This Executive Order furthers the Governor’s platform which emphasizes that employment should be available to all. The MSPE Consortium is now seeking appointments to the re-purposed Disability Resource Commission, which is charged with monitoring implementation of the Order, so that it may begin the tasks the Governor authorized it to perform.



Executive Order Signing

“Mississippians with disabilities are a largely untapped resource for employers, and in many cases, the hiring of Mississippians with disabilities represents a viable business option that both meets the needs of an employer and provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to use their strengths and skills.”

**Governor Phil Bryant
Executive Order 1335
January 14, 2014**

Legislation modeled upon the language of the Executive Order was approved unanimously by the Mississippi House of Representatives during the 2014 Legislative Session, but did not get out of committee in the Senate. Efforts are underway to seek additional sponsors to submit the bill in the 2015 Session, so these efforts will become law and survive beyond the current Governor.

Transition

Priority: Develop a strategy to ensure that EVERY school district has a minimum of one full-time, appropriately trained transition coordinator whose only job is to follow transition age students, coordinate transition assessments, assist in developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs), locate work placements, and maintain data on the students' progress on IEP and transition goals/objectives.

✓ **Progress – Mississippi Department of Education**

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has made revisions to several of its policies that direct and guide services for Special Education. These include the addition of a vocational assessment for children age 14 and above to eligibility general guidelines. It also amended another policy to provide that students with disabilities who exit high school through the District GED Option Program shall be provided a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting postsecondary goals.

MDE has interagency agreements with five other state agencies, but these have not been revised since the MSPE Project began. MDE collaborates with a number of agencies and groups, including MSPE, and has partnered with Vocational Rehabilitation for statewide training that included local school districts. It has further provided in-person and web-based training on transition to districts, as well as specific training on federal Indicator 13 (transition services). MDE's training to teachers, administrators and others emphasizes the importance of special education and related services that are designed to meet students' unique needs and prepare them for future education, employment, and independent living.

✓ **Progress – Vocational Rehabilitation/School System Joint Transition Specialist Program**

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program at MDRS has continued to partner with local school systems to fund transition specialists who work with students in their final year of school. In the 2013-14 school year, 12 school districts are participating in this program. They include school systems in the following counties: Hancock, Madison, Laurel, Jones, Jackson, Canton,

Lauderdale, Lamar, Oxford, Petal, Quitman, and Wayne. Plans are being developed to also serve Jackson Public Schools in Hinds County soon.

Under this program, the school systems and VR each pay 50% of the cost of the transition specialist. Schools are not allowed to use federal funds to pay their share. The Employment Work Group plans to research the legal basis for this limitation in its next report, and to develop recommendations to encourage all school districts to participate in this program.

VR serves approximately 3,000 students each year through this program. See information regarding VR's "Smart Work Ethics" classes on page 25.

✓ **Progress – Pilot Projects**

As part of the overall MSPE Project, the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities provides administrative oversight to three pilot projects which include work within school districts to improve transition services, give students actual employment experiences while in school, and assist them in finding competitive employment within the community when they exit school.



Rankin County School District – *Gathering Grounds*

The Rankin County School District created a two phase transition project almost three years ago. During Phase 2, the project serves Special Education students, especially those between ages 18 and 21, who may have slipped through the cracks in obtaining supports leading to employment opportunities. Phase 2 was designed to encourage eligible students not to exit school, and assist them in finding competitive paid employment before they turn 21. The group started with five and has now grown to eight new people. Currently four of its past students and three of the current students have found employment.

As a result of implementing Phase 2, the school district discovered a broader need for employment training inside the high schools. The school system wanted to find a way to make sure its students had access to real employment training in an environment where they felt comfortable and safe. The district applied for and received an MSPE pilot project grant through the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities. With those funds, *Gathering Grounds*, a program that allows students in the district to get real life work experience while still in school, was established.

Gathering Grounds is a community-based business (coffee/art shop) teaching students transitional work skills in an inclusive environment. Students operate the coffee shop which also features and sells original student artwork. The goal is to provide work experience and social skills training that are important for career development. The project has garnered extensive support from the nearby community of Brandon and has begun to host inclusive social events. **A total of eight students have obtained competitive employment as a result of participating in *Gathering Grounds*.**



Jesse Couret's Story

“If I can do it, you can do it!” ~ Jesse Couret

Jesse Couret was a high school student who enjoyed working with children and traveling. She wrote down her dreams for the future as a 9th grade school assignment. Then she experienced encephalitis meningitis resulting in a coma. After she was brought out of her coma it was found that she had brain injury resulting in a significant short-term memory loss that made it difficult for her to function independently. Her return to school was not successful, and she received services in her home for the remainder of her high school years.

As she reached the age when other students were preparing for life after high school, Jesse's homebound teacher mentioned Rankin County School District's Phase 2 program, which was just beginning. It was just what Jesse needed! When she first began the program she could not remember how to return to her classroom if she left it, but she steadily improved with help from others. Jesse had always loved working with children and while she was in Phase 2, it was discovered that she had a true gift of being able to help children with autism. She could get small pre-school children with autism to quickly calm down when they were agitated. After being prepared by the Phase 2 program and gaining work experience at *Gathering Grounds*, Jesse found paid part-time employment in the Rankin County School District's pre-school autism program. She loves her job and the children she works with.

When Jesse is not working she enjoys spending time with family and friends. She loves going bowling and exercising. Zumba



is her favorite work out and she walks two miles a day! Jesse also enjoys shopping at the mall and eating at her favorite restaurants.

Her favorite spot to vacation is Lake Forest Ranch in Macon, Mississippi where she has also been a camp counselor. Jesse recently reviewed her 9th grade goals and found she has achieved every one of them—just in a somewhat different way than expected.

Jesse has made many friends through her participation in the Rankin school district's transition programs, and encourages others to follow their dreams. As she emphatically states, **"If I can do it, you can do it!"**

Heather Hall's Story

Ready for the World

Nineteen-year old Heather Hall has traveled a long path to independence. As a young teen, she spent two years at North Mississippi Regional Center because of the lack of community services in her rural community, and because her mother was never told of other options. She was able to leave the facility with the support of Mississippi's ID/DD Medicaid Waiver program when her family moved to Rankin County, where for the past few years she has attended Pucket High School. Like many young people, Heather decided she did not want to stay in school until she was 21. Like her peers, she wanted to begin her future and transition into the beginning of adulthood by working in the community, despite the possibility of unforeseen obstacles and unfamiliar territory. Her family had many fears and concerns but obtained support services, advocacy services and other tools to assist Heather in her transition.

Heather's participation in Rankin County's Phase 2 program was her catalyst to wanting to have a real job and her own apartment. Heather obtained work experience at the *Gathering Grounds* coffee and gift shop. There she learned how to assist customers, fold retail clothing, refill the supplies for the store, clean the restrooms and wipe down tables. She always gave her customers a bright smile and welcoming conversation. This program encouraged her to continue forward.

During her time transitioning onto her own, Heather received help from Disability Rights Mississippi and The Arc of Mississippi who assisted her in getting appropriate supports through the ID/DD Waiver program. One support was an attendant who provided her

with transportation and assistance in maintaining her life in the community as a young adult. Her attendant has taken her shopping, to the hair salon, and to social outings for karaoke and church dances. The more social events Heather was able to participate in, the more skills she gained.

Heather graduated in May 2014, and participated in all ceremonies with her senior class. After graduation, she moved into her new apartment with supervised living through Son Valley, an ID/DD Waiver provider. While waiting to locate a job that meets her skills and needs, Heather will continue to train with Son Valley staff, who will assist her with shopping, social outings and any other services she may need for her day-to-day living. VR is also providing services that will assist Heather in finding work. Heather is not just waiting for a job to appear

– she and her mother have created a video resume that “sells” Heather’s personality and skills, and she is using that to search for the right job. Heather desires to lead a life like everyone else, and has the support of her church, friends and her family every step of the way.





**Oxford School District –
BOLTS Program**

The Building Opportunities for Learning and Transition Success (BOLTS) Program of the Oxford School District is another pilot project funded by MSPE through the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities. It began August 1, 2012. Its goal is to increase competitive employment outcomes and/or transition services for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who attend the Oxford School District.

BOLTS provides on-campus work training opportunities, job/career videos or pod casts through digital media, a transition training guide, transition training opportunities, expansion of the current array of transition services, and hands-on training for future teachers. The purpose of the project is systems change and capacity building to promote and support employment of people with IDD in the community.

The mission of the BOLTS project is to increase the employment outcomes of students with IDD by implementing three project goals:

- To expand, develop, and enhance the transition service provision offered to students with IDD.
- To provide up-to-date and timely information, instruction, and training to students with disabilities, their parents and family members, businesses, and community leaders about the Oxford School District's transition program that will result in increased awareness and understanding of people with IDD and competitive employment opportunities for them.
- To expand and provide opportunities for students to receive instruction and participate in a variety of school and community-based work experience and training activities which will prepare them to move into competitive employment in the local community as they transition from school to adult life.



The BOLTS program has worked on several levels simultaneously. The school-based work experiences involve learning to make and prepare pottery for sale, and also gardening and marketing greenhouse products. These school based work experiences have resulted in many students' eventual placement in jobs in the community.

Since the beginning of the program in 2012, 32 students have obtained employment.

Systems outcomes are equally noteworthy. The District developed the *Preparing for Life Transition Planning Guide*, which documents the steps to create and implement a successful transition program. This guide has been made available to other districts and is being reviewed by the Mississippi Department of Education for possible adoption. Another aspect of the project was for students with and without disabilities to work to produce videos of community-based work environments in the Oxford area. These videos, completed last year, are posted on the school system website and are available to all students as part of their exploration of possible jobs in the community. Most recently, three Oxford School District Special Education personnel were trained as trainers and facilitators of the “Smart Work Ethics” program, and 17 students are currently participating in this training. Moreover, these personnel have offered to train staff in other school districts regarding this program.

BOLTS staff have strong connections to the local community, which has enabled them to get quick results when help is needed. For example, when students began working at a location without a bus stop, their teacher arranged for a bus stop to be added there so they could safely travel to and from work.

**Gathering Grounds participants
and community supporters in
front of the coffee shop**



**Students in BOLTS concentrating
on the task at hand**



Customized Employment – A Two Pronged Approach

A third pilot project funded by MSPE through the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, is titled “Customized Employment: Linking Job Seekers with Employers.” A key goal is to improve the current reimbursement system used by the Home and Community-Based Intellectual Disability/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD) Waiver and work with VR to reimburse sheltered workshops which provide Customized Employment services.

This project collaborates with school personnel and sheltered workshop providers to introduce and support efforts to use the Customized Employment

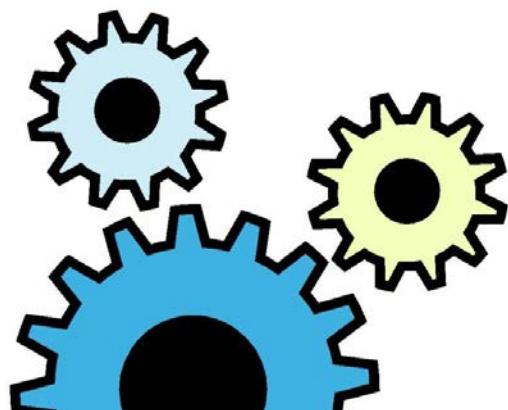
approach to assist students with significant disabilities as they transition from school to work.

During the first year, Customized Employment worked with three sheltered workshops to begin the process of Customized Employment to link job seekers to community employers, and three school districts to seek job shadowing experiences. First year participating school districts included Jackson Public Schools, Petal School District and Lauderdale County Schools. During the second year, West Bolivar School District was added to the project.

The Arc of Mississippi leads this project. School personnel have received training and have identified students who may benefit from Customized Employment services.

As detailed below, several students have begun work experience, while still in school, while their post-school planning is occurring. Quintella Proctor, featured in the following story, graduated and obtained employment in the community as part of VR's LINC employment program, which covers the salary of the worker. Two other students have recently started workplace learning opportunities at the Department of Mental Health (DMH). One operates a coffee shop and the other handles administrative assistant duties. All of the students have learned and demonstrated skills to assist them as they move from the school to work environment. DMH employees have also benefited in unanticipated ways from getting to work with these students, resulting in a "win-win" situation for everyone.

The second prong of this project, which focuses on participants of sheltered work programs, is discussed in the Facilities and Work Activity Centers section of this report.



Quintella Proctor's Story

Great Things Come in Small Packages!

Quintella Proctor is a 19-year-old 2014 graduate of Lanier High School who recently acquired a paid job at a local YMCA in Jackson, MS. While still in school, she was able to gain work experience via a partnership between the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and Jackson Public Schools (JPS) as part of the Customized Employment Project.

Quintella's Individual Education Plan indicated that she was interested in the health field. DMH has a wellness center to encourage state employees to get and stay fit. Quintella became the Wellness Center attendant, coming from her high school and working eight hours per week. Her duties included cleaning the center, checking the equipment, filling out requests for maintenance, guiding new participants through the orientation process, handing out water and towels, and ensuring that participants followed the

wellness center rules. She developed skills to motivate people to work out and do better each time they were in the center. Staff members knew that if she was in the building that day, they would be getting a visit from her to find out why they had not worked out. Employees at JPS could not believe the change that came over Quintella as her confidence grew. She was a quiet student, but became a talkative, outgoing worker.



While she was working at DMH, her Mississippi Department



of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) supported employment counselor observed her work during several days as part of the assessment process. Employees of JPS developed a task analysis and portfolio to share as much information about her to assist with locating a job that matched her strengths and abilities.

As a result of her hard work and her service providers' cooperation and support, Quintella was given an opportunity to demonstrate her skills at the YMCA. She has been working five days a week, four hours a day, earning minimum wage through VR's LINC's program, and receives support services from her job coach from MDRS. As her LINC placement ends, VR is helping her find employment in a community setting where her new skills can be used.

Quintella is known as someone who will get the job done with a bright smile. She performs duties that require flexibility, which she handles well! She assisted with the lunch preparation for the YMCA's summer food program, where she set up lunch bags, added items to them, and then arranged the bags on the table for pick-up. She also helped with cleaning up after lunch. Her favorite part of her job is reading to the children. At home, she enjoys listening to her favorite pop star, Justin Bieber, and playing with her cat Seymour.

Quintella is off to a great start and working towards her future dreams.

Facilities and Work Activities Centers

Priority: Make employment a key element of all person centered transition planning.

Advocate for all agencies who conduct person centered planning for individuals with DD/ID between the ages of 16 and 30 who are transitioning into the community to make integrated employment a key priority, to be considered first, in the planning process. This includes the Department of Mental Health, the Medicaid Bridge 2 Independence Program, and any other groups using person-centered planning for transition planning.

Priority: Ensure that all Work Activity Centers (WAC) actively assist workers in finding community employment. In community Work Activity Centers, goals should be set for each person with the objective to move to competitive employment. Long-term participation in the WAC should not be the norm.

✓ **Progress – Many People in Community Settings No Longer Work in WAC**

A goal of this project is to reduce the use of “sheltered” workshops as workplaces for people with developmental disabilities. “Sheltered workshop” is a general term for work centers where the only workers are people with disabilities often paid below minimum wage.

Work Activity Centers (WAC) within Mississippi are specific sheltered work settings operated by DMH on the grounds of their regional centers. Some people who live in the community return to a WAC for employment. The WACs have begun to move such people, who live in the community at their family homes or group homes, from employment at the WAC to integrated work settings. For example, Boswell Industries has moved 31 people, including Willie Turnage, whose story is featured next. North Mississippi Regional Center WAC has moved six people. MIDD - West Works has moved 38 people. Willowood has four people working in the community, and Hudspeth Regional Center WAC has seven people. These people live and work in the community in an integrated setting and no longer attend the WAC at any point during the day.

✓ **Progress – Re-purposing Work Activity Centers**

During the upcoming grant year, fiscal year 2015, the Bureau of IDD at the Department of Mental Health will be discussing with its grantees the idea of repurposing their WAC into a Supported Employment Program or some other creative idea regarding employment and transitioning.

✓ **Progress Still Needed for Facility Residents**

Facilities within Mississippi are also making plans to move people who live at the facilities from employment at the WAC to more integrated work settings. However, the WAC on the campuses of regional centers have not yet transitioned anyone from the WAC to competitive employment.



Progress – Customized Employment for People in Sheltered Workshops

The second prong of the Customized Employment pilot project mentioned above is to identify and work with sheltered workshops willing to assist people working there to transition, via Customized Employment, to work within the community. This project involves the Arc of Mississippi, VR, and various employment providers. These included the Department of Mental Health, Pine Belt Mental Health, Willowood and MIDD Meridian in the first year, expanding to Community Counseling Services in Starkville during the early part of the second year, and expected to further expand to include Life Health of Cleveland during the latter part of the second year.

The primary focus and achievement thus far have been to build the infrastructure to provide reimbursement for Customized Employment services. Late in the first year, an agreement was reached whereby VR would reimburse providers for some of the services, such as Discovery, involved in the customized employment process. A great deal of training was provided to acquaint the

providers with the philosophy and process of Customized Employment and, as noted above, schools were invited to and involved in this training. Several people have been identified and begun to work through the Discovery phase of the Customized Employment process. In addition, connections made through this project have resulted in supported employment opportunities for other people served by the participating agencies. See Sapaletto's story as an example of this.

One long term goal of this project is for VR to formalize the reimbursement schedule for these types of services, and use it statewide after the pilot projects are completed.

Priority: Support national campaign to amend Section 14 c. Nationally, there is a nonpartisan collaborative effort to phase out the sub-minimum wage provisions of Section 14 (c) of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. The MSPE Consortium will stay abreast of those efforts, support them, and ensure that any changes at the federal level are communicated to and promptly implemented by, affected state entities.

✓ **Progress: Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act**

Representative Gregg Harper of Mississippi has introduced legislation that would phase out the 14(c) program over three years. As Harper explained on June 6, 2014, this bill “is about reversing years of discrimination and backward thinking about the capacity of workers with disabilities...”

“The recognition of the employment capacity of this disenfranchised population of people with disabilities is a necessary evolution of our society. Our understanding of the employability of those with disabilities continues to grow. The types of jobs and skills to perform these tasks expand every day. Even more, assistive technologies empowering workers with disabilities to be productive are constantly being developed. To provide real opportunities for every individual to reach their full potential, the tools and tactics for employment must perpetually move forward.”

Community Services and Supports

Priority: Promote more focus/specialization on needs of individuals with ID/DD.

VR, Client Assistance Program (CAP) and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) should develop proactive programs, trainings, or services to address the needs of transition aged individuals and individuals with cognitive disabilities.

✓ **Progress: VR program of MDRS**

As described above, VR is participating in the Customized Employment (CE) pilot project by establishing reimbursement rates for CE services in the pilot sites. It is expected that this will become a permanent statewide systems change. VR has trained 56 of its employees in the concepts of Customized Employment. These employees are available to the target population state wide.

Another new VR program is called “Smart Work Ethics” classes. These classes provide soft skills training, which involves learning skills which everyone needs to get along at work in a competitive work situation. These skills include how to act during a job interview, getting to work on time, appropriate dress for work, and appropriate behaviors in the work environment. These classes are offered throughout the state and may be tailored toward the specific group’s needs.

MDRS and the Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (BIDD), have been working for over a year on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to address the needs of people with ID/DD who desire employment and for “blending and braiding” of services and funding. Although the MOU is not yet finalized, those who want to work are referred by DMH to VR in a new method of referral intended to speed up the referral process and assist the person with IDD to explore employment options.



Willie Turnage's Story

Work Ethic Leads to Independence



Willie Turnage, who has intellectual disabilities, grew up in South Mississippi, learning ethics and humble values from his mother and grandparents. Now age 30, Willie has applied his elders' teachings about the benefits of hard work to his life, resulting in personal satisfaction and increased independence.

While living with his mother in Brookhaven, Willie received services from the Boswell Regional Center (BRC). He first attended a Work Activity Center to hone his personal and employment skills, and received assistance in obtaining employment in the community. He began working part-time at Popeye's in Brookhaven with the aid of a job coach provided by his the ID/DD Waiver.

He was first tasked with providing condiments for the patrons. His diligence and care for making the customers happy led to greater roles in the

kitchen. **“There is nothing like the feeling you get making somebody happy,” Willie stated. “I learned early in life to always do a good job and people will respond. Plus, you feel good about yourself.”**

Willie was working part-time but wanted to be more independent. Again with the help of his ID/DD Waiver services and BRC, a year ago he successfully moved into a supported living apartment in Magee. His outstanding work record at Popeye’s in Brookhaven allowed a rare transfer to a Popeye’s in Magee where he continues to work. In addition he works part time in the cafeteria at BRC. He is very well liked and well thought of by both staffs.

“I was very popular. They gave me a going away party in Brookhaven and really hated for me to leave,” Willie remembered. “ I just had to know that I could live on my own. Pay my own bills and buy my own stuff.”

Willie now lives in a well-furnished one-bedroom apartment. He has his own bank account and has purchased a sleigh bed, lounge chair and television. He is most proud of his bed which is surrounded by posters of wrestling heroes. He watches wrestling every Tuesday night, a carryover from his childhood. Another childhood dream was to be a preacher. He studies the Bible and prays every day and has a number of sermons ready should the occasion arise.

Willie loves basketball and often plays with friends in the evenings. He claims to always be happy and passes his good nature on to everyone he meets during the day. He is very proud and grateful to be living on his own and making decisions for himself. He recalls the saddest time in his life was when his grandmother died. He learned from this that he can choose to be happy each day, and he does!

He sometimes wishes that he might preach in a church. That is his ultimate goal in life and he has not given up on this dream. If hard work can accomplish this goal, Willie will be ready when the time comes.



Sapaleto's Story

Agency cooperation leads to a real job



Sapaleto (who requested we use his first name only) was a humble, respectful and hard-working 21-year-old young man who wanted a job since he graduated from high school. He had a significant Learning Disability and received special education services to succeed in school. During his senior year at Hattiesburg High School, he toured Pine Belt Industries, a sheltered workshop operated by Pine Belt Mental Health Center (PBMHC) and decided he would like to work there. He graduated in June 2011 and began working around the same time.

At Pine Belt Industries, Sapaleto worked on mail boxes that are sold from various locations. He earned a piece rate which was less than minimum wage. While working at Pine Belt Industries,

Sapaletto met PBMHC staff person Connie McGrew, who got to know him and realized his potential for successful employment in the community.

At the same time, the PBMHC, through its Director Nick Hartley, was working with The Arc of Mississippi on its Customized Employment project, funded by MSPE through the MS Council on Developmental Disabilities. Connie learned about Customized Employment and was able to make a connection with the director of Forrest General Hospital and speak with him regarding customizing jobs for PBMHC clients. This director had already had positive experiences with customized employment when working in another state, and believed it was an excellent idea. He requested two people to work at Forrest General. One of the positions was offered to Sapaletto based on his experience, strengths, and interests. He was hired and given the job title of “sanitarian,” working 20 hours a week at the hospital on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday and making minimum wage. He proudly wore his name badge and his black uniform to go to work washing dishes. The vocational rehabilitation program of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) initially provided the supported employment services Sapaletto needed to learn his job, but he soon became capable of performing it on his own.

When asked in June 2014 how he liked his work, Sapaletto smiled, and in his meek voice said “**I love it,**” showing a sense of pride in his accomplishments.

Sadly, Sapaletto passed away after a brief illness in August 2014. His family hopes his story will inspire others.

✓ **Progress –Work Incentives Planning Program Re-established**

Although not a result of the MSPE project, the re-establishment of benefits counseling will fill a great need voiced by youth and young adults with disabilities, and their families, as they seek to understand the interplay between benefits and earnings. This need was also identified in MSPE's First Year report, and we are pleased to share information about the re-establishment of a key program which addresses this need.

MDRS once again is receiving federal funds to operate a work incentives program, the Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice, formally known as M-PIC. The goal of the program is to educate, train, and transition beneficiaries from benefits to work. Social Security Disability and other public benefit programs are complex, hard to understand, and difficult to navigate. M-PIC recognizes the need to assist Mississippians in understanding how their benefits may be affected by work and the incentives that are offered for those wanting to transition to work. The program will continue to offer an advantage to work by providing education and training on accurate benefits information pertaining to each person's unique situation.

The program will be a statewide collaborative outreach program to the state's Social Security beneficiaries receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Social Security Income (SSI). The staff, known as CWICs, will be recognized in the community as Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice Specialists (M-PICS).

The Project Director/Coordinator and Administrative Assistant are located in the MDRS Starkville, MS office. All staff have been trained. They will cover all 82 counties of the state making it easier for Mississippians to locate a specialist closest to their communities.

✓ **Progress – Client Assistance (CAP) Program**

The Mississippi Client Assistance Program (CAP) receives federal funds to provide independent advocacy services for clients and applicants for services from

the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, and the Independent Living programs of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS).

There is no fee charged for any service provided by the CAP. Statewide services are provided on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. No member of the MSCAP staff is an employee of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Since the beginning of the MSPE project, CAP has begun to mentor clients with intellectual disabilities and to ensure that they learn about recreational opportunities.

✓ **Progress – MS Department of Employment Security (MDES)**

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) has redesigned its MDES website to be more user-friendly and accessible. System modifications and upgrades have been made, and information is being requested to MDES Online Employment System to track how well people with disabilities are being served. Statewide, all comprehensive WIN Job Centers have been upgraded to have Jobs Access with Speech (JAWS) 15 in their resource rooms. MDES also modified job agency job announcements/recruitments through Human Capital Department to add inclusive language for hiring persons with disabilities. MDES has conducted on-site interviews to hire persons with disabilities at the Hattiesburg WIN Job Center.

MDES employees received on-going ADA training, awareness and soft skills courses at the Addie McBride Center for the Blind, and an employee Lunch-2-Learn session to learn/refresh sign language skills presented by the Mississippi School for the Deaf.

An MDES internship program for students who are work-ready was developed and implemented in partnership with AbilityWorks. Students work a minimum of 25 hours per week to obtain work-ready skills. One person with IDD was hired by MDES after completing this program and has been employed for over 12 months! AbilityWorks of Jackson facility manager Janice Berry and counselor

staff have been invited to set up a tour of MDES' WIN Job Center to become more familiar with the services that are offered so they will share the information with their clients and encourage them to visit the centers.

MDES and VR collaborated to hold a highly successful EmployAbility Job Fair in Jackson in January 2014. The Governor's Office was also involved. There were 39 registered employers and over 650 job applicants, including a significant number with IDD. According to the post- event reports from 32 of the employers, 513 resumes were submitted, 174 on-site interviews were conducted, 60 job offers were made the day of the job fair, and it was projected that 63 people will be hired from the job fair during the next year.



Crowd at EmployAbility Job Fair

Priority: Encourage Medicaid system to prioritize integrated employment.

Advocate for Mississippi Medicaid programs, including waivers and Medicaid buy-in, to reward and facilitate work in the community, and eliminate any incentives for sheltered or segregated work activity or pre-vocational services, unless clearly time-limited.

✓ **Progress – Changes to the ID/DD Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver**

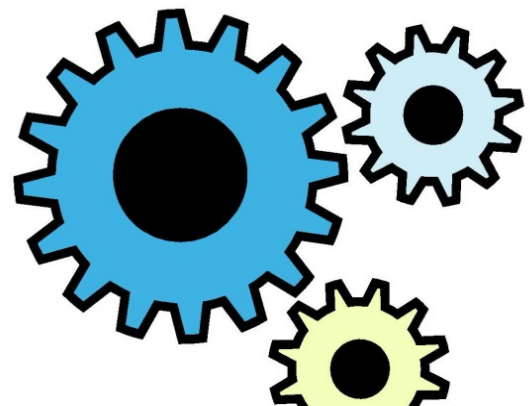
Several new employment-related services were added to the ID/DD Waiver that was approved by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) on July 1, 2013.

These include:

- Modification of Prevocational Services
- Modification of Supported Employment
- Addition of “Job Discovery” as a new category of services

Other major changes include changes in terminology and more emphasis on Person Centered Thinking and Person Centered Planning. Plans are to be reviewed a minimum of every 90 days. The definition of Prevocational Service was revised to clarify that it must be for a defined period of time, and may be part of a trial work experience.

Working with a consultant, Medicaid and DMH also have proposed rate changes for ID/DD Waiver services. They held several informational meetings about the proposed new rates and invited comments from the public. The final proposed rates were presented to the Rate Study Advisory Group in August 2014, and will be used in the DMH’s FY 16 budget request to the Legislature.



Description of Job Discovery (from Waiver Renewal Application)

Job Discovery includes, but is not limited to, the following types of person-centered services: assisting the person with volunteerism, self-determination and self-advocacy; identifying wants and needs for supports; developing a plan for achieving integrated employment; job exploration; job shadowing, informational interviewing; labor market research; job and task analysis activities; employment preparation (i.e. resume development, work procedures); and business plan development for self-employment.

There are several components and features to the Job Discovery process. Job discovery is intended to be time-limited. The initial discovery process should result in the development of a person-centered career profile and employment goal or career plan.

Individual staff must receive or participate in at least eight hours of training on Customized Employment before providing Job Discovery services.

Job Discovery should not exceed 20 hours of service over a three month period and will result in the development of a career profile and employment goal or career plan. Additional monthly increments/hours must be justified and prior authorized by the BIDD.

Individuals who are currently employed may not receive Job Discovery. Peoples must be at least 18 years of age to participate in Job Discovery.

A person cannot receive Prevocational Services or Day Services - Adult at the same time of day as Job Discovery. Individuals cannot receive Supported Employment and Job Discovery at the same time.

✓ **Progress – ID/DD Waiver supported employment services increasing each year**

Data from the IDD Waiver program show a slight but steady increase each year in the number of people served, and the amount of money spent, to provide supported employment services through the IDD Waiver.

Fiscal Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
People served	207	224	229	240
\$ Spent	1,680,800	1,961,932	1,990,317	2,026,300

This represents a 16% increase in the number of people served, and a 20% increase in funds used to provide supported employment since 2011.

✓ **Progress – 1915(i) Amendment to the Medicaid State Plan**

Mississippi Medicaid received approval in late 2013 to amend the Medicaid State Plan to include specific services for Medicaid eligible persons who do NOT need ICF/IID or nursing facility level of care.

- The program is working on finalizing definitions and a Memorandum of Understanding between Medicaid and the Department of Mental Health. These must be completed before services can be provided.
- Services under 1915 (i) include:
 - pre-vocational
 - supported employment
 - day habilitation
- There will be NO “slots” or waiting list—services will be provided by Community Mental Health Centers as well as other DMH certified providers who choose to provide the services.
- Targeted case management will be provided by the ID/DD Regional Programs.

These are significant changes which, along with recent guidance from CMS, the federal agency with Medicaid oversight, should lead to improved planning and implementation of employment services and supports through the Medicaid program for youth and young adults with disabilities.

Conclusion

Work opportunities are expanding for youth and young adults in Mississippi with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Pilot projects, state agency coordination, and leadership by policy makers have all begun to demonstrate that successes are possible and should be expected! Systems changes have begun, but much more needs to be done to ensure that the stories featured here are the norm rather than the exception, and will continue long after the Mississippi Partnerships for Employment grant ends.

For More Information

Mississippi Partnerships For Employment
www.mspeidd.org

Managing Partners:
Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities
www.msccd.org
601.359.6238

Institute for Disability Studies, University of Southern Mississippi
www.usm.edu/disability-studies
601.266.5163

Disability Rights Mississippi
www.drms.ms
601.968.0600 800.772.4057

Funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
(AIDD)

