

First Annual Disability and Employment Conference

DECEMBER 1-2
2009

Conference Proceedings



PRESENTED BY:

Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative
and

Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center

SPONSORED BY:



“The conference opened my eyes to see that we can work outside of the box to help individuals with disabilities find jobs.”

“The conference helped me focus on possibilities instead of limitations.”

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INTRODUCTION

The “First Annual Disability and Employment Conference” was held December 1-2, 2009 in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. The goals of the conference were:

- To develop a conference focusing specifically on employment and individuals with a broad range of disabilities.
- To highlight two new initiatives funded by Pathways to Employment (Minnesota’s Medicaid Infrastructure Grant) – the Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (MNTAT) and the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI) – while connecting a large number of individuals to their resources and to taking leadership in impacting employment of Minnesotans with disabilities.
- To “raise the bar” in expectations in employment of Minnesotans with disabilities by generating enthusiasm and momentum in developing innovative practices and policy implications toward the goal of doubling employment of Minnesotans with disabilities by 2015.

Interest in the conference exceeded the expectations of the planning committee and registration was filled within one week. There were over 300 participants who devoted a day and a half to attending.

The conference utilized a unique format with topical presentations followed by table conversations after each presentation facilitated by over 30 trained volunteers. Table facilitators provided conference participants the opportunity to share their reflections on the innovative practice highlighted in the presentation and on ways in which they could utilize the practice or take steps to learn more about the practice.

Conference participants were assigned to specific tables to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. Tables included representatives from local government, schools, state agencies, disability organizations, and service providers specializing in mental health, developmental disabilities and other disability groups. People with disabilities, family members and employers were also included.

Day One was dedicated to learning how innovative practices have resulted in unique employment outcomes for people with disabilities in the following topical areas:

- Individualized Strengths-Based Employment
- Self-Employment and Business Ownership
- Diverse Funding Strategies and Asset Development
- Innovative Assessment and Career Planning/Interest-Based Negotiation

Conference evaluations for Day One indicated a high degree of satisfaction and enthusiasm from conference participants.

- 98% indicated the information was useful to them with a cross-section of topics identified as most beneficial
- 92% indicated that the table conversations following the presentations deepened their thinking about the topic as they learned from others at their table who came from a variety of perspectives
- 49% indicated the conference changed their views on disability and employment with many others indicating that the conference reaffirmed their commitment to increasing employment of people with disabilities

Day Two of the conference focused on the policy implications of disability and employment through facilitated table conversations and a call to action. Participants brainstormed questions which have been presented by the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative to groups throughout Minnesota to identify policy recommendations to dramatically increase employment of Minnesotans with disabilities. The questions were:

- What's working? What are we doing right in Minnesota? What facilitates employment of Minnesotans with disabilities?
- What will it take to double the employment of Minnesotans with disabilities by 2015?

Conference evaluations indicated that participants found the facilitated brainstorming session informative and that it strengthened their commitment to employment of people with disabilities. Participants generated a wealth of recommendations (summarized below) with policy implications in raising expectations about the abilities of individuals with disabilities, in improving transition services, collaboration, training and technical assistance and transportation.

The Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center and the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative are providing follow-up actions to conference participants and others to continue the momentum generated by the conference. For more information about MEPI, visit www.mn-epi.org. For more information about MNTAT, visit www.mntat.org.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

DAY ONE OPENING SESSION

Bob Niemiec, Director of the Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (MNTAT) opened the conference with a brief welcome and statement of purpose. He talked about the conference being a result of the work of a planning group that included the principle sponsors of the event, MNTAT, MEPI, and Pathways to Employment, Pathways representatives in the Minnesota Department of Human Services (Disability Services Division), and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (Vocational Rehabilitation Services); representatives of the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota State Council on Disability and Minnesota APSE.

Bob introduced MaryAlice Mowry, Director of Pathways to Employment. MaryAlice extended a warm welcome to the participants and reiterated the significance of a conference of this nature being held in Minnesota. She thanked the planning committee and the partners of Pathways to Employment that make a continuing contribution to assisting people with disabilities to enter the community workforce and becoming contributing members of the economic success of the state.

Assistant Secretary of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Kathy Martinez, had been scheduled to attend and deliver the keynote address. Assistant Secretary Martinez was taken ill and unable to make the trip to Minnesota. In her place, Rachel Dorman, ODEP Policy Advisor, attended and provided a brief overview of the employment participation of people with disabilities. She also pointed out that ODEP views Minnesota as a leader in disability employment and employment first. She mentioned how the Office of Disability Employment Policy was very interested in the proceedings of this conference, and expressed her excitement at being in Minnesota and taking an active part in the conference.



Following the introductions, Bob Niemiec set the stage for Day One by explaining the conference format and processes. There would be four presentations that would introduce innovative employment practices. Following each presentation of approximately 30 – 40 minutes, there would be a 20 – 25 minute discussion period during which the participants would answer two questions:

- What struck you about this practice or concept?
- How can you put this practice into use?

Facilitators that were assigned to each table would record the comments and ideas from the participants. The record is summarized in this report.

INDIVIDUALIZED STRENGTHS-BASED EMPLOYMENT

Cary Griffin, Griffin-Hammis Associates

Cary Griffin began the introduction of innovative employment practices with his presentation on Individualized Strengths-Based Employment. This is a customized approach that is directed to one person at a time. It can be wage employment (working for an employer) or self-employment. In either case, the employment would result in wages at or above the minimum wage. This is more than employment; it is also an economic development strategy.

Customized Employment takes a non-comparative approach to job and economic development. Most hiring is done through comparative application processes and people with disabilities do not often succeed in the comparison model. An individualized, strengths-based approach bypasses the comparative methods by helping people with disabilities discover their “personal genius” and by identifying recurring vocational themes in the person’s life. Using an innovative assessment approach called “Discovering Personal Genius,” or simply, “Discovery” is rapidly becoming a way to accomplish this. A subsequent presentation describing Discovery and how it leads to Interest Based Negotiation would be presented later in the day.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS OWNERSHIP

Molly Sullivan, Griffin-Hammis Associates

Self-employment and business ownership by people with disabilities is an emerging practice that was presented by Molly Sullivan of Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC. Self-employment is an option that would be identified as a result of Discovery, an innovative assessment and career planning process. When pursuing whether self-employment makes sense, a business feasibility process is explored to ensure a “right fit.” Self-employment and business ownership are not alternatives to “day programs,” nor should they be used as a strategy for people who have not been successful in wage employment. Self-employment must only be pursued when it makes sense for the individual and when there is a legitimate business need. Self-employment includes supports just as might be developed in wage employment.

All effective employment strategies involve a team of people who are committed to the success of the individual with a disability. In the case of self-employment and business

“I learned the importance of really knowing my [jobseekers] in order to provide the best service.”

ownership, people who might not traditionally be part of a support team would be engaged. This team might include business consultants, financial counselors, other business owners, etc.

When Discovery leads to a business idea, and a business feasibility study determines that the idea makes sense and it is a good fit, a business plan is developed along with a resource plan. The business plan is implemented, the business opens and adjustments are made along the way.

Self-employment and business ownership must result in work that is meaningful and is consistent with the individual's strengths and conditions of employment. It has to result in work that pays and provides increased financial standing. It should also lead to helping the person accrue wealth and increase their social capital – natural, reciprocal relationships with other people and businesses in the community. While pursuing self-employment and business ownership may not be for everyone, they can be a great opportunity for some people.

DIVERSE FUNDING STRATEGIES AND ASSET DEVELOPMENT

Molly Sullivan, Griffin-Hammis Associates

Funding, lack of funding, or funding restrictions are often given as reasons for why individualized community based employment is not pursued or developed for some people with disabilities. Molly Sullivan followed her session on “Self-Employment” with a presentation about diverse and creative approaches to achieve and maintain employment.

Put quite simply, when one lives inside the “funding box,” funding dictates the employment goal. When one lives outside the funding box, the employment goal dictates the funding. One must take an inventory of what funding resources are needed, what is available, and learn how to be creative in filling the gaps.

The most traditional funding in the Minnesota human service world includes Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid Home, Community Based Services and county-based funding. Molly discussed non-traditional sources, such as Plans to Achieve Self Support (PASS), Social Capital, Individual Training Accounts (through the One-Stops), Individual Development Accounts, microloans, personal savings and trust funds, Ticket to Work, etc. Once again, she advised people to take an inventory of what is available in their communities, know the parameters to access each, and expand the opportunities to expand their resources and options.

“The funding presentation was very enlightening. It gave me a better idea of what can be done.”

Nearly two-thirds of working age adults with a disability experience consistent poverty. The “benefits box” keeps people in poverty. Employment is the first step out of poverty and into the “asset box.” Financial literacy, debt reduction and asset development are important for everyone, not just people with disabilities. Creative funding strategies mean greater employment options. Learn about current and new funding strategies and cultivate them. Explore how asset-building strategies can be more readily available to people with disabilities.

INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT AND CAREER PLANNING/ INTEREST-BASED NEGOTIATION

Cary Griffin, Griffin-Hammis Associates

Discovering Personal Genius, also known as Discovery, is an innovative process (of assessment) that seeks the input of the individual, family members and other people who know the person well. The Discovery process results in the identification of three vocational themes and the person’s ideal conditions of employment. The next step is locating twenty places where each of the conditions and themes exist in the community, resulting in a list of sixty potential locations. The key is to arrange informational interviews for the job seekers that are based on a mutual interest with the business owner. It is not about asking for a job, but for information. This low pressure, non-traditional approach often results in a job.

Customized approaches capitalize on satisfying the mutual interests of the job seeker and the business owner. It involves learning how to practice “interest-based negotiation” and casual job development. It is based on the concept that employers are always hiring; that is, they are always ready to hire somebody that can improve their business, thereby improving the bottom line. The challenge is to help people with disabilities recognize their “exploitable skills” and learn how to parlay those skills and interests into jobs or businesses. In other words, going where the career makes sense.

PARTICIPANT REACTIONS

Following each of the four presentations, the conference participants were asked to give their reactions and suggestions about how these innovative practices might be of benefit to them and to the disability employment efforts in Minnesota. The following is a sampling of their responses:

Session 1 – Individualized Strengths-Based Employment

- Stop going to the “big box” companies and those with HR Department
- Connect with small businesses

- Know people in your community
- Work with Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and counties to take this approach
- Help individual job seekers to represent themselves
- Advocate for a one-person-at-a-time approach
- Look at starting with younger kids – encourage parents and teachers to set the stage for employment and expectations
- Look for creative ways to get around funding barriers
- Discovery is an exciting and intriguing process – need to know more

Session 2 – Self-Employment and Business Ownership

- Self-employment may be a good option in rural areas
- Recognizing the amount of resources out there
- MNTAT should provide Training and Technical Assistance to providers of families wanting to work through the process – grant could be used to build partnership with universities to set-up a business or start up programs with university students
- Identify possible candidates and use Discovery
- Need to be sure to assess personal qualities to make sure people are well-suited
- Give up the idea that we need to be the expert
- The support network for entrepreneurs needs to be different

“I found the personal experiences shared by the speakers very beneficial.”

Session 3 – Diverse Funding Strategies and Asset Development

- Attitude is a barrier. People are afraid of risk. Families are convinced their children will make too much money with a job and are afraid to lose benefits. We need to point out all of the options for families to make informed choices. We should also be sure that people from other cultures are informed.
- Teaching benefit literacy
- Teach financial planning and train people what various programs are
- Use MN Work Incentives Connection
- Thinking about moving people out of entitlement mindset. It’s hard to get people to understand and accept thinking out of the box
- Struck by the idea of starting with the employment goals and find the funding to match

- Encourage concept of asset development for job seekers – it is the ultimate goal of being employed

Session 4 – Innovative Assessment and Career Planning; Interest-Based Negotiation

- The time spent on the Discovery Process may sound like a lot, but it will save time in the long run; don't get caught up in the time
- Get families involved in the process; educate parents; Discovery process is great to recommend to them
- See people in more than one setting when assessing for a job
- Training needs to switch to Discovery practice training
- Employers are always hiring. We recognize we need to create value for “our job candidates” which means looking at business’ needs and pair it with job seeker skills
- Look at what Discovery approach is in our ACT team and taking a team approach to it
- Going beyond job descriptions – talking jobs to the needs of the employer is a new approach

“[This conference] helped open my eyes to challenges faced by individuals outside my sector along with ways I can change how I provide services to improve employment efficiently.”

DAY TWO KEYNOTE

Doug Crandell, Grants Manager, Cobb County Community Services Board “Using Innovative Practices to Make a Difference”

Doug Crandell from Atlanta, Georgia presented the second day keynote. He advocated a more integrated approach to employment for people with disabilities. Doug emphasized that employment is seen as an “add on” and not a necessary service. He stressed the



need to link employment to housing, healthcare, transportation and other segments of the service delivery system and to its impact on quality of life indicators. Doug discussed the fragmentation that characterizes the system and advocated an integrated support system that incorporates employment with a variety of support services and tracks real outcomes.

INTRODUCTION TO LISTENING SESSION QUESTIONS

Carol Rydell, Project Manager of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative, introduced the policy portion of the conference. The Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI) is conducting fifteen listening sessions in 2009 and 2010 with specific disability groups and in specific topical areas to be used as the basis for policy briefs and recommendations to improve employment outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities. Conference participants were asked the same questions that are being posed for listening session participants:

- What's Working? What are We Doing Right in Minnesota? What Facilitated Employment of Minnesotans with Disabilities
- What Will It Take to Double Employment of Minnesotans with Disabilities by 2015?

The first question on "What's working" was to identify the strengths and leadership of Minnesota in improving employment outcomes. It is as important to identify the strengths of the system as it is to identify barriers because clarifying strengths is an important first step in targeting policy needs. When groups focus on strengths, it helps them to see opportunities upon which to build in addition to creating a positive and energizing focus for the second and core question about doubling employment for Minnesotans with disabilities.

Conference participants identified the following examples of leadership and strengths that Minnesota can build on to improve employment outcomes:

WHAT'S WORKING? WHAT ARE WE DOING RIGHT IN MINNESOTA? WHAT FACILITATES EMPLOYMENT OF MINNESOTANS WITH DISABILITIES?

Minnesota's Tradition of Collaboration

- History of working to provide services using a team approach
- Interagency groups that include



education, community and agency partners

- Developing partnerships with business
- Willingness to share strategies rather than just compete with one another
- Efforts at the local level to build relationships and reduce fragmentation
- Coordination of services across housing, employment and health care
- Collaboration between the private and public sector

Raising Expectations

- Rising expectations across stakeholder groups
- Shifting the focus toward competitive wages rather than sub-minimum wages
- Greater awareness of the potential of people with disabilities to work

Disability Service Delivery System

- Variety of funding options – waived services, Extended Employment Program, etc.
- Flexible funding system and success in accessing federal funds and federal grants
- Choice of employment service providers
- Strong system of medical supports
- Strong social network system
- Minnesota tradition of progressive services and leadership
- “People First” orientation
- Movement toward integrated community services

Education

- History of transition services for students aged 18-21
- Work experience opportunities within school services
- Transition services start early
- Strong tradition of early intervention services which better prepare individuals for school
- Post-secondary training and education options
- Working with parents on the expectation of employment for their children
- Integration with regular education creates expectation of normalized adult life



Employers

- Efforts to educate employers about the abilities of people with disabilities
- Building partnerships with employers
- Educating employers about job accommodations
- Large corporations increasing opportunities for people with disabilities
- Changing attitudes from sub-contracting with an organization to direct hire of people with disabilities
- “State as Model Employer” Initiative

Advocacy

- Parents advocating for work opportunities for their children
- Development of self-advocacy movement
- Strong private non-profit sector pushing government agencies on employment
- Celebrating and sharing success stories on employment

Training

- Internship opportunities
- Fast-track training programs
- Job coaching
- Events like “First Annual Disability and Employment Conference”

Person-Centered Services

- Tradition of person-centered planning processes
- Focus on abilities rather than deficits
- Individualized services

Disability Benefits

- More work incentives like MA-EPD (Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities)
- More resources to assist individuals, families and organizations in providing a reliable understanding of work incentives to promote employment, such as the Disability Linkage Line and the Minnesota Work Incentives Connection (see “Resources Area” section for more information on these initiatives)

Transportation

- Options in public transportation are improving
- Metro Mobility expanding service area
- Local communities collaborating across groups (disability, seniors, etc.) with transportation needs

“It was very helpful and worthwhile to have attendees from the various affiliations at each table. It resulted in a more lively and informative discussion.”

As tables finished their responses to “What’s Working,” they moved on to the second question and generated additional ideas as outlined below:

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO DOUBLE EMPLOYMENT OF MINNESOTANS WITH DISABILITIES BY 2015?

Raising Expectations/Changing Perspectives

- Public view people with disabilities as contributors to the workforce and economy
- Employment is expectation
- Employment as civil rights issue
- Change expectations of employers and families
- Influence media and stereotypes portrayed – share success stories
- Public service announcements
- Buy-in of residential providers to create more flexibility in work hours
- Shift to strengths-based model
- Include disability in diversity efforts

Systems Change/Legislative Action

- Less red tape and paperwork
- Flexible funding that supports innovative practices
- Incentives for employment outcomes
- Increase Extended Employment funding to support ongoing supports
- Align policy, funding streams and licensing
- State as Model Employer Initiative
- Dollars follow person
- Develop uniform definition of employment and data management system – establish baseline
- Legislative study to analyze effectiveness of system and make recommendations for improvement

- Develop cost/benefit analyses on effects of employment
- Address disincentives to integrated employment, i.e., perception that it is more expensive
- Legislative action to force collaboration between state agencies and break down silos
- Look at what we are buying

Collaboration

- Better interagency cooperation
- Develop a 5-year plan with business and state and local government to promote employment
- Reduce fragmentation
- Increase collaboration among service providers
- Continue cross-agency conferences
- Broaden connections/communication beyond current homogeneous groups
- Work with unions

Education

- Provide more practical and paying job experiences in school
- Ensure youth have social security card, interviewing skills, work experience, resume to facilitate employment
- Students graduate into jobs
- Shift current emphasis on testing and academics to career planning and technical education
- Develop better services for students with mental health disabilities
- Create expectation of employment beginning in primary school
- Start transition services earlier
- Develop certificate programs for students with disabilities
- Develop incentives for continuing education
- More career counselors in schools

Employers

- Get employers on board and committed to hiring people with disabilities and promoting their employment with other businesses – employers talking to employers
- Employer incentives to train and hire – What's in it for them?
- Approach employers from economic/workforce development perspective – meet

the employer's needs

- Focus on small businesses
- Provide analysis of how people with disabilities can contribute to bottom line – job carving
- Active business advisory panels
- Focus on benefits people with disabilities bring to workplace – address myths
- Speak the same language as business
- Utilize social networking to connect with employers
- Focus on impacting of future labor shortage

Training and Technical Assistance/Best Practices

- Use the Discovery process for job development
- Use social networking methods other jobseekers are utilizing
- Focus on retention, not just job placement
- Develop self-employment opportunities
- Focus on assisting people with disabilities to increase their skills
- Better understanding of unique issues of each disability group, i.e., diagnoses and medications for persons with mental health disabilities
- Ensure support services are available to maintain employment

CALL TO ACTION

Jon Alexander and Don Lavin, co-directors of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative, ended the conference with a “call to action.” Our system generates a 22% employment rate for people with disabilities. Systems and organizations are perfectly designed to give the results that they achieve. Nearly everyone is calling for improvement in outcomes, but not as many are calling for improvement to the system.

If change is to become a reality, a minimum of three things must occur. The first is that the status quo must be challenged. Simply put, no part of the system should be considered too important to be unchanged. Secondly, individuals with disabilities and their families must have the power to control their fate. Current systems are not designed to achieve that outcome. Finally, there must be a return on the investment in this new system. A uniform data collection system that focuses on employment outcomes needs to be developed and implemented state-wide so that we know what improvements are being made.

The overarching goal of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative is to raise the bar of

public expectations through facilitated leadership, stakeholder dialogue, and improved public policies in Minnesota. The two-day conference and its proceedings promoted the importance of a shared vision for an inclusive workforce where all Minnesotans, including individuals with significant disabilities, are welcomed and supported to share their talents in gainful employment activities.

To this end, MEPI has established a fundamental goal to double the employment rate of Minnesotans with disabilities by the year 2015. Achieving this outcome will require close collaboration and successful integration of employment activities and business

"I feel fired up again!"

initiatives across multiple state agencies, county human service agencies, secondary and post-secondary education programs, disability and employment service providers, disability and parent advocacy groups, business associations, training and technical assistance resources, and others concerned with disability, employment, and economic development issues.

The First Annual Disability and Employment Conference concluded with a "Call to Action." Attendees were challenged to consider their next bold moves in supporting a proposed expansion to double the employment participation rate of Minnesotans with disabilities. Further, attendees were asked to reflect on specific goals and unique



contributions each could make as individual leaders and/or organizational collaborators to advance Minnesota's support systems of education, (re)habilitation, disability, employment, workforce, business, and economic development in new directions. Success is intentional and integrating new policies and practices within Minnesota's educational and adult service systems will require shared and measurable goals to achieve better outcomes over time.

Finally, attendees were reminded that the conference was not a one-time event but yet another coordinated step in mobilizing and blending expertise, generating new public policies, redesigning service delivery systems, retooling funding structures, equipping professionals with new skills sets and promising service practices, and galvanizing the public-private partnerships needed to attaining employment outcomes of historical significance in the State of Minnesota.

CONFERENCE MATERIALS

The Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI)

The purpose of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI) is to develop leadership and dialogue facilitation around disability and employment policy that will result in the increased employment of Minnesotans with disabilities in the competitive labor force and promote Minnesota's value proposition: "We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper." Employment is fundamental to adulthood, quality of life issues and earning the means to exercise basic freedoms and choices as citizens.

The Initiative will work with numerous stakeholder partners to align policies, services and practices to increase competitive employment of people with disabilities and meet Minnesota's workforce needs. Stakeholder partners will include business, government, education, disability advocacy organizations, employment service providers, community support agencies, self-advocates and their families. MEPI will also work in close collaboration with the recently funded Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (MNTAT) to maximize the impact of employment policy and practice across Minnesota. MEPI and MNTAT are initiatives of [Pathways to Employment](#), Minnesota's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

APSE, in conjunction with its state chapter Minnesota APSE, provides leadership for this initiative bringing more than 20 years of experience and knowledge in the area of employment policy through its proven record of advocacy and education on the value of integrated employment and improved employment practices. Among the activities planned by MEPI for the two year funding period are:

- Develop a joint website in conjunction with MNTAT
- Develop a policy component for an annual employment conference with MNTAT
- Develop policy briefs and issue papers based on 15 topical policy listening sessions (including five sessions in conjunction with MNTAT Development Sites) designed to gather input and build consensus from stakeholder groups on policy changes needed to shape improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities
- Support four mini-summits hosted by business leaders to champion increased integrated employment opportunities
- Develop and update a scorecard highlighting progress in advancing employment policies and practices in Minnesota
- Make recommendations toward the development of a uniform definition of employment and uniform data management practices across state agencies
- Collaborate with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Minnesota State Council on Disability (MSCOD) and other state agencies to provide information on developing employment policies and practices that increase opportunities and pathways into the workforce by all Minnesotans who want to work
- Strengthen and build new alliances to enlarge the circle of employment champions
- Integrate systems change policy initiatives across federal, state and local agencies.

www.mepi.org

Carol Rydell, MEPI Project Manager, has over 30 years of experience working toward inclusion for individuals with disabilities and has managed innovative projects at Kaposia for over fourteen years. She has developed a student-run business with secondary education students with disabilities, a welfare to work service, a customized employment service for Latinos with disabilities and has worked with local government and community organizations to maximize employment opportunities for women, minorities and people with disabilities. She also has experience as a consultant, advocate and teacher and is a trained facilitator and strategic planner.

Contact information: Carol Rydell, Kaposia, Inc., 380 E. Lafayette Freeway South, St. Paul, MN 55107, 651-789-2815, crydell@kaposia.com.

Jon Alexander is Co-Director of MEPI and Chief Executive Officer of Kaposia where he has worked since 1998. He is a nationally recognized leader in the development and expansion of customized employment services. He has been on the national board of APSE since 2005 and is currently its treasurer. He is a founding member of the Minnesota Employment First Coalition.

Contact information: Jon Alexander, Kaposia, Inc., 380 E. Lafayette Freeway South, St. Paul, MN 55107, 651-789-2817, jalexander@kaposia.com.

Don Lavin is Co-Director of MEPI and Vice-President of Rise where he has worked since 1976. He supervises the planning, development, operations and evaluation of supported and customized employment programs for youth and adults with a wide range of disabilities and other barriers. He has a 34 year track record as a grant writer and strategist and is the author of eight books on competitive and supported employment practices. He is a national speaker, mentor, trainer and technical assistance advisor. He is also a founding member of the Minnesota Employment First Coalition.

Contact information: Don Lavin, Rise, Inc., 8406 Sunset Road Northeast, Spring Lake Park, MN 55432, 763-783-2815, dlavin@rise.org.

Laura Owens is the Executive Director of APSE, a national membership organization with a mission to lead in the advancement of equitable employment for people with disabilities. APSE provides advocacy and education on the value of integrated employment, improves practices to promote integrated employment and promotes national, local and state policy development to enhance the social and economic inclusion and empowerment of individuals with disabilities. She is also an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and Director/Founder of Creative Employment Opportunities, Inc., an employment agency for individuals with disabilities.

Contact Information: Laura Owens, APSE, 451 Hungerford Drive, #700, Rockville, MD 20850, 414-581-3032, lowens@apse.org.

MEPI is funded with support from a Competitive Employment Systems-Medicaid Infrastructure Grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to Minnesota's Department of Human Services (Grant #1QACMS030325). The funds for this grant were authorized through the Ticket to Work-Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170). Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance 93768.

The Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (MNTAT)

The Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center, or **MNTAT** for short, was recently funded by the MN Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Pathways to Employment. The mission of MNTAT is to design and broker state of the art person-centered employment training and technical assistance to increase the participation of all Minnesotans, especially people with disabilities, in the workforce.

MNTAT will utilize proven, inventive, and evidence-based methods that meld the needs of employment seekers, the business community, service providers, policy makers, families, educators, workforce development professionals and other Minnesota stakeholders. MNTAT will be cross-disability in focus and geographically diverse in its reach.

MNTAT Activities Include:

- Web-based Customized Employment Certificate training presented by Griffin-Hammis Associates including such topics as:
 - Introduction to Customized Employment
 - Introduction to Self-Employment
 - Discovery and Customized Assessment
 - Resource Ownership
 - Active Employer Councils
 - Customized Job Development Strategies
 - Job Analysis and Worksite Instructional Strategies
 - Negotiation Tactics for Customized Employment
 - Pass Plans and Related SSA Work Incentives
 - Conducting Informational Interviews
- A series of webinars on Evidence-Based Supported Employment presented in collaboration with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)
- Planning and hosting a statewide Employment Conference on December 1-2, 2009
- Establishing Community Action Teams (CATs) to act as demonstration sites, developing best-practice examples, and proposing policy that supports the full employment of Minnesotans with disabilities.

The MNTAT website will be the primary source of contact and communication. The website will also host links to a library of webinars, video training and written materials related to disability employment topics. MNTAT will act as a clearinghouse for training and events within Minnesota, and as resource for Minnesotans seeking additional training and support in their employment pursuits.

MNTAT is operated by Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC
www.mntat.org

Bob Niemiec is a Senior Consultant with GHA and serves as the Director of the Minnesota Employment Services and Technical Assistance Support Center. Prior to that, Bob was the Director of Employment and Community Supports for Community Involvement Programs in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Bob also serves as a mentor for the Wisconsin Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) in their CRP Rebalancing Project. A graduate of Indiana University, Bob has been in the field of employment for persons with disabilities for twenty-eight years. Bob served as the Chair of the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for seven years as well as being a member of the Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Council. He is a Past-President of APSE: The Network on Employment, a founding member, former President, and current board member of Minnesota APSE, former President of the APSE Foundation, a current member of the Editorial Board of The Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, and a founding member of the Minnesota Employment First Coalition.

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Pathways to Employment (PTE)



The mission of Pathways to Employment is to increase competitive employment of people with disabilities and meet Minnesota's workforce needs by bringing together people with disabilities, employers, businesses, government and providers.

Three Minnesota state agencies ([Minnesota Department of Human Services](#), [Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development](#), and the [Minnesota State Council on Disability](#)) have partnered to develop and implement Pathways to Employment, a comprehensive employment Medicaid infrastructure grant funded through the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170).

Pathways to Employment Overview

The purpose of Minnesota's Pathways to Employment (PTE) is to increase the employment rate and earnings of people with disabilities, and meet the needs of Minnesota employers through full use of the state's workforce.

Some of the desired outcomes for Pathways to Employment are:

- An increased rate of competitive employment of people with disabilities
- Increased numbers of employers who recruit and hire people with disabilities and thereby better meet their workforce needs
- Improved quality of life of competitively employed people with disabilities · Greater earnings by people with disabilities
- Well-coordinated services and supports that prepare people with disabilities to enter and succeed in the competitive workforce

Since 2001, PTE has worked to further develop the state's infrastructure to better support the employment efforts of Minnesotans with disabilities. PTE has provided policy and program support to the Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities program (MA-EPD), developed policies that focus on employment in community integration and consumer-directed initiatives, and worked within the Minnesota Department of Human Services and with partner agencies to generate ongoing support of employment of people with disabilities.

A four-year Medicaid infrastructure grant (2005-2008) gives Minnesota additional resources for improving the systems that support people with disabilities and Minnesota employers. With support from this grant PTE will:

- Create partnerships to meet workforce needs and expand job opportunities
- Develop public policies that support competitive employment for people with disabilities
- Coordinate employment services and supports
- Coordinate information and communications
- Strengthen transition services and work experiences for youth and young adults
- Improve and coordinate data collection and analysis

Go to the PTE webpage for information about PTE activities, downloadable plans and reports, and links to PTE activities and resources. <http://www.deed.state.mn.us/pte/>

Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MA-EPD)

A MA-EPD fact sheet was provided in the conference packets. To access this document, go to <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfs/legacy/DHS-3532-ENG>

CD of “Creating Communities of Economic Cooperation: Making Customized Employment Work”

This CD was given in the conference packets. To access the information that was available in the CD, visit <http://www.mntat.org/resources>

RESOURCE AREA

Pathways to Employment (PTE)

http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/All_Programs_Services/Pathways_to_Employment/

A partnership between the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and the Minnesota State Council on Disability to develop a comprehensive employment Medicaid infrastructure grant funded through the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170).

Disability Linkage Line (DLL)

www.disabilitylinkage.info

1-866-333-2466

The Disability Linkage Line is a free service that provides support, options, and resources regarding disabilities. The service is available during regular business hours.

Social Security Administration Work Incentives

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/generalinfo.htm>

The work incentives are particular rules that can allow an individual to work and still receive monthly payments and Medicare/Medicaid.

The Minnesota Work Incentives Connection

<http://www.mnworkincentives.com/>

A nonprofit agency, MN Work Incentives Connection serves Minnesotans with all types of disabilities by offering information about the relationship between work and benefits so they are aware of their options.

Minnesota APSE

<http://www.mnapse.org/>

This is the Minnesota chapter of the national organization. APSE is a membership organization formed to improve and expand integrated employment opportunities, services, and outcomes for persons experiencing disabilities.