

# State Agency Promising Practice

2007

TOPIC:  
Collaboration

## Working Together to Convert the Last Sheltered Workshop in Vermont to Individualized Supports

By Jennifer Sullivan Sulewski

### Background

Vermont's Division of Disability and Aging Services (DDAS) and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) worked with a local service provider to convert its congregate day services to community employment. Implementation Between 1987 and 2002, DDAS and DVR worked with several providers to close down sheltered workshops and move people into community supports.

### Implementation

This promising practice focuses on the yearlong process that led to the conversion of the last remaining workshop, Champlain Vocational Services (CVS), in 2002. The Center on Disability and Community Inclusion at the University of Vermont worked with provider management, staff, individuals with disabilities, and family members to convert the workshop to an individual supports provider. A key component was the involvement of various stakeholders.

In addition to discussing the conversion process at ongoing monthly parent and family meetings, CVS held several largescale "family forums." It was made clear at these meetings that the actual decision to close down the workshop had already been made and was not open to discussion. Still, the meetings provided an important opportunity for family members to raise concerns and influence the process. Parents were concerned about their adult children's safety and their treatment in the

community. Talking through these concerns and how they would be addressed increased their level of comfort, although not all were convinced that closing the workshop was a good idea. Parents were also concerned about the loss of the social network of the workshop; to address this, CVS continued to offer opportunities for social contact such as lunches at the provider site.

Working with provider staff was also important as they went through a painful process of not only having their job descriptions changed radically but having the value of their past work called into question. Regular staff meetings to discuss the conversion process alleviated difficulties, although some staff never felt comfortable with the changes and eventually left.

Another important part of the conversion process at CVS (and other Vermont workshops) was the change in funding rates from group to individual supports. Individualized budgets had already been in place, but some individuals' day supports budgets had been based on a group rate and had to be increased to allow 1:1 individual supports. A combination of individualized funding from DDAS (under the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services waiver) and funding for ongoing services

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from DVR (supported employment funding) helped create individualized supports for people leaving the workshop.

Finally, technical assistance from the University of Vermont Center on Disability and Community Inclusion was an important tool for conversion. Funded by both state agencies, this technical assistance on supported employment philosophy and methods helped CVS with the practical aspects of restructuring resources and staffing towards a more individualized, supported employment-based model.

## Impact

The workshop closed in 2002, and all former participants now receive individualized day and employment supports in the community.

## Suggestions for Replication

- » Involve all stakeholders. In Vermont, the state partners and provider management worked with staff, families, and workshop participants to make the change a “human process.”
- » Use individualized budgets and funding levels. Vermont used funding from both DDAS and DVR to individualize supports.
- » Provide technical assistance to providers during the conversion process. The aid from the University of Vermont was an important asset.

**For more information on this practice  
contact [thinkwork@umb.edu](mailto:thinkwork@umb.edu)**



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