

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council Position on Sheltered Workshops and Segregated Employment

Adopted April 2005, Updated January 21, 2010

Position Statement

While once playing a valuable and important role in the lives of people with disabilities, sheltered workshops and segregated employment for people with disabilities have now outlived their usefulness and are an unnecessary violation of individual rights and a drain on resources which force people into environments that severely limit their ability to choose real, dignified and meaningful employment or community volunteer opportunities. As such, funding and other state support for vocational service models that segregate individuals with disabilities from the mainstream of society should be transferred to services that provide community inclusive, integrated and competitive employment resulting in independence, self-determination and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Discussion

The Developmental Disabilities Council recognizes that the segregation of individuals with disabilities in sheltered workshops is unnecessary, discriminatory and a violation of rights for individuals with disabilities. Simply because they are people who happen to have a disability, individuals segregated in sheltered workshops are not afforded the opportunity to seek employment as they see fit, and are limited in their ability to join American society as productive members of the workforce.

“The goals of the Nation properly include a goal of providing individuals with developmental disabilities with the information, skills, opportunities, and support to make informed choices and decisions about their lives; pursue meaningful and productive lives; contribute to their families, communities, and States, and the Nation; have interdependent friendships and relationships with other persons and achieve full integration and inclusion in society, in an individualized manner, consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities of each individual.” The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (P.L.106-402)

“The Nation's proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals; and the continuing existence of unfair and unnecessary discrimination and prejudice denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous, and costs the United States billions of dollars in unnecessary expenses resulting from dependency and non-productivity.” The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (P.L.101-336)

As used in the Americans with Disabilities Act, the term "discriminate" includes

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“limiting, segregating, or classifying a job applicant or employee in a way that adversely affects the opportunities or status of such applicant or employee because of the disability of such applicant or employee.”

Sheltered workshops by their very nature discriminate against people with disabilities in that they segregate people because of disability, limit people because of disability, and adversely affect the opportunities and status of people because of disability. Research demonstrates that supported employment provides increased income, expanded social relationships, and heightened control of decisions and activities,¹ and adaptive skills.²

All people, regardless of the severity of their disability, should have the opportunity to seek employment as they see fit. The Council supports the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all facets of community life - where they live, learn, work, play and worship - so they are free to experience life, pursue happiness and enjoy independent, productive lives in their communities. Segregation in sheltered workshops limits the choices of people with disabilities and deprives individuals of the benefits and freedoms afforded by participating in community life.

Louisiana should support people, not programs.

The Developmental Disabilities Council urgently recommends that Louisiana:

- 1) Increase its capacity to provide high quality individualized employment services in the community that are consistent with the individual’s interests and career goals by:
 - transitioning existing segregated vocational programs to integrated competitive employment and/or integrated community activity options;
 - administering an adequate provider rate structure that incentivizes the provision of integrated competitive employment services; and
 - ensuring a qualified and stable workforce of vocational support staff who earn a living wage with benefits;
- 2) Develop and implement an “Employment First” policy to ensure that employment is the first day-service option considered for all people, regardless of the severity of their disability; and
- 3) Implement a definition of work that includes community-integrated job placement, wages equal to or higher than the federally-mandated minimum wage, and a level and amount of work appropriate for the individual.

References:

- ¹ Murphy, S. T., Rogan, P. M., Handley, M., Kinkaid, C., & Royce-Davis, J. (2002). *People’s Situations and Perspectives Eight Years After Workshop Conversion*, *Mental Retardation*, 40, 30 - 40.
- ² Stephens, D. L., Collins, M. D., Dodder, R. A. (2005). *A Longitudinal Study of Employment and Skill Acquisition among Individuals with Developmental Disabilities*. *Research in Developmental Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 26, 469 - 486.

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