

Maine (ME) WIOA Matrix

Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program (EFSLMP)

SRC: Has DVR collected evidence to support a 5% decrease in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities? Why does this objective only address individuals with intellectual disabilities when Employment First Maine is a cross-disability initiative? (O) State's Strategies (Goal 2 Objective 4). (Page 224)

AGENCY RESPONSE: Section J (Statewide Assessment) within the Executive Summary includes the following: Demand for community inclusion and access to employment by people with disabilities and their supporters continues to be strong across the country with consumer choice and opportunity for full participation being important for all. The advocacy and advice of the State Rehabilitation Council, Client Assistance Program, and Disability Rights Center, as well as groups such as Maine APSE and the Employment First Coalition, help to ensure that rights are being respected, laws are being followed, and practices are being improved to increase the successful employment of people with disabilities. (Page 228)

SRC: Has DVR collected evidence to support a 5% decrease in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities? Why does this objective only address individuals with intellectual disabilities when Employment First Maine is a cross-disability initiative?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR is mandated to prioritize services to serve those with the greatest significance of disability. Individuals with intellectual disabilities have historically experienced substantial barriers to competitive, integrated employment. (O) State's Strategies (Goal 2 Objective 4) (Page 234)

Objective: Maine DVR will undertake efforts to continue to embrace and implement an "Employment First" philosophy during the next year as documented by a decrease of 5% in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities. (Page 280)

Maine's legislature passed the Employment First Maine Act into law in June of 2013, establishing integrated community-based employment and customized employment as the "first and preferred service or support option" for people with disabilities. The passage of the law is a natural progression in Maine's focus on competitive integrated employment as a valued outcome for the state's citizens with disabilities. The state, like many that have passed Employment First laws, is now grappling with what it means to be fully compliant with the law.

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REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR sits on DOE’s State Personnel Development Grant and has participated in multiple joint training opportunities. DVR Asst. Director serves as Co–Chair of IDEA Part B Advisory Committee. DOE is a partner in Employment First and Special Services Director Jan Breton co–chairs subcommittee on transition. DVR presented at the MADSEC Special Education Directors annual conference in October 2014 as well as recorded a webinar on DVR services for posting on the Maine Department of Education website. Maine DVR works very closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure timely referrals. Through MDOE sponsored trainings and regional groups, Maine DVR has had the opportunity to reinforce the message that the best time for referrals to DVR is two years before high school graduation or exit. Due to staff turnover in the field this is an area that needs regular attention. (Page 298)

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Requested services. The staff who responded to the query about services most often requested by consumers (n=44), struggled to rank order them. In fact, 70% of the respondents did not rank order their responses to the services listed. Many considered two or three items as at the same rank (for instance, they listed employment and independent living skills as most frequently requested, rather than employment first and independent living skills second or vice versa). Therefore, I have extrapolated rankings based on the responses that I received and manually computing by weighting the responses to get at ranking. Clearly, the most frequently requested services (listed as the number one requested service by the most respondents) were employment and independent living skills training, followed requests to acquire assistive technology. In Table 3.12 the rank order of services most often requested by DBVI consumers is reported by total number of requests noted by the respondents. (Page 397)

Customized Employment

GROW AND DIVERSIFY MAINE’S WORKFORCE THROUGH IMPROVED ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT—COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS In addition to the outreach plan designed specifically to ensure accessibility of programming among those most in need, Maine’s core partners will strive for a statewide universal design of coordinated activities and resources to provide high quality, customer centered services to all individuals. Core partner coordinated activities include:

- Learner–centered approaches to instruction and occupational training;
- Appropriate and meaningful assessments of participants’ educational and occupational skills (including prior learning assessments) and needs (including accessibility needs for participants with disabilities);
- Supportive services, including academic supports (e.g., tutoring and advising); nonacademic supports (e.g. child care, transportation, and financial assistance); career exploration; and navigation assistance through the career pathway program and ideally, into retained employment;
- Expanded use of technology to increase access to workforce development services;

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- Quality work experiences, including job placement assistance and ideally, quality sector/occupation specific pre-employment work experiences (e.g., apprenticeships, internships). With this customized approach, all participants, including the target populations, are able to access the programming and services necessary to become fully engaged in the workforce system. For example, by working with individuals using various tools, such as Discovering Personal Genius and Customized Employment, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services will encourage some individuals with significant disabilities to consider self-employment as a viable option with appropriate supports. (Page 62)

Braiding/Blending Resources

The Section 188 Checklist will inform training topics and plans for managers, supervisors, and facility operations staff. Initial training for staff and partners will include, at a minimum:

- General orientation to universal access, WIOA and other legal requirements;
- Customer service—both culturally sensitive service and general customer service;
- Resources within the system and in the larger community;
- **Complaint resolution.** A variety of training approaches will be considered and deployed, depending on available financial and human resources, training topics, and other conditions. Co-training with and for partners will be considered to best use resources and help system partners' staffs to "be on the same page." Blending and braiding training resources will be a guiding principle. All one-stop center staff will be trained and required to demonstrate competency in serving diverse populations and knowledge of related policies across the system and among partner agencies. One-stop center certification will depend on demonstrating that employees have achieved the required competencies in universal access. Policies: Existing policies will be reviewed and updated to reflect WIOA intent and to meet the standards articulated in the Section 188 Checklist. Universal access policies that will govern one-stop center certification will be developed in collaboration with the Bureau of Employment Services' Division of Policy and Evaluation and the State Board Program Policy Committee. (Page 110)

Because Maine's growing refugee and immigrant populations are beginning to move to many different communities in search of employment opportunities, local providers that do not receive EL Civics dollars are braiding state and local funds, private grant dollars, and making use of volunteers to provide English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Literacy classes, citizenship training, and other classes that address the communication skills adults use daily in their roles as worker, family member and citizen. (Page 197)

Registered Apprenticeship: Utilization of registered apprenticeship will continue to be a strategic priority for the State and will be emphasized as a required component of local area service delivery design. The Maine Apprenticeship Program has worked closely with high-growth industry sectors in Maine, such as health care, and have been instrumental in establishing career pathway approaches for low wage high demand occupations, such as Certified Nurse Assistant, that provide an upward mobility path. These approaches have included blending of resources from the Maine Apprenticeship Program tuition assistance funds, Title 1-B programs, the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program and the industry partners. (Page 146)

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Section 188/Section 188 Guide

Standards, Maine Adult Education will provide high quality instruction that in turn will lead to higher performance measures. ASSESSMENT OF TITLE III WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAMS – ACCESSIBILITY – EEO PRACTICES Wagner-Peyser programs are assessed at the same time as Title IB program reviews are being conducted. Staff members are interviewed regarding knowledge and practice of explaining job order procedures and job seeker registration services and are asked to explain the ways in which they provide employer assistance and help in creation and resolution of jobs orders. A review of orders and assessment of staff regarding EEO and affirmative action requirements is also conducted and random review of staff knowledge of these requirements and Wagner Peyser regulations are also melded into the question review process. Processes to provide initial assessment and appropriate referrals to Info Center customers and front end procedures are also reviewed. In some instances participants may also be interviewed either directly on site or via telephone. Monitors use the Checklist provided under Section 188 to conduct the accessibility review. Center accessibility requirements are also assessed and staff members are asked to explain how customers can access the assistive technology in the centers; all required posted information is examined to ensure that it reflects the most up-to-date version of the regulations and whether or not centers are able to provide the information in Braille and other languages besides printed English. At least once annually a separate Equal Employment Opportunity review is conducted by the State EEO officer. The EEO officer reviews sub-recipient compliance with universal access and non-discrimination requirements through examination of participant applications and enrollments against demographic data. Likewise participant files are reviewed again to ensure that all staff assisted participants have been provided with the required EEO statement and their rights to file a complaint. (Page 81)

SECTION 188 CHECKLIST The WIOA Section 188 Checklist developed by the USDOL Office of Civil Rights will be the guiding document for the working group. The checklist is considered a comprehensive overview of requirements and provides reliable advice on achieving and sustaining universal access.(Page 109)

The working group will establish minimum standards of access, based on the Section 188 Checklist, and issue guidance to the system and its partners to help them meet the standards. The Maine State Board has several committees designed to address the workforce needs of specific constituencies, including women, older workers, younger workers, veterans, and people with disabilities. These committees will be asked to advise the universal design working group on programmatic and physical access and to assist with policies and operational guidance to assure that the one-stop system and its partners are accessible and meeting requirements. Other organizations serving and representing job-seeking constituencies, including migrant and seasonal workers, “displaced homemakers,” ex-offenders, populations whose identities are based on culture/ethnicity/religion, youth, people with disabilities, and older Mainers will be consulted and invited to participate in planning, policy review, staff training, testing and evaluating programmatic and physical access, including customer service. (Page 110)

MONITORING PROGRESS The Section 188 checklist and policies will be used to monitor the system’s progress toward universal access. Quantitative outcomes will be used, when practical, to assess system accessibility and utilization by WIOA’s priority populations. Best practice models from other systems and other states will be researched and tailored to Maine whenever possible. (Page 111)

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We will use the Section 188 checklist, Promising Practices In Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide, and the USDOL's Integrated Service Delivery Toolkit to assist system partners, providers, and local boards with guidance on developing their own monitoring tools. (Page 112)

Additional Information In addition to the requirements listed for training program initial and continued eligibility, training providers must meet the following:

- a. **Non-Discrimination:** All training providers must comply with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity regulations at 29 CFR Part 37, Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Provisions, and 10 the USDOL Section 188 Disability Reference Guide.
- b. **Accessibility:** Training providers must provide physical and programmatic accessibility and reasonable accommodations/modifications, as required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended; section 188 of WIOA; and the regulations implementing these statutory provisions.
- c. **Criteria for Eligibility:**
 - a. State Criteria - In establishing criteria pursuant to WIOA sec. 122(b)(1), the State shall take into account each of the following:
 - i. Performance Accountability and Outcomes
 - ii. Ensure access to training services throughout the State (including use of technology)
 - iii. Dissemination of Performance Outcomes and training information
 - iv. Training must lead to "In-Demand" industry occupations
 - v. State licensing requirements and licensing status of providers. (Page 131)
- Outreach to Job Seekers –Wagner Peyser staff act as the initial interface with most job seeker participants entering the system, they conduct initial triage and provide resource navigation and referral services so it is imperative that they have the skills necessary to do this in a customer-centric way and in accordance with Section 188 and the requirements identified in the Local Area MOUs regarding referrals and access to system partner services. In addition, staff needs to be trained to effectively relay all of the required information such as that listed under Basic Career Services. To ensure all staff is adequately trained and have the professional skills necessary to provide services in this way a state-level professional development team was formed to evaluate WIOA-related staff development needs and identify and access resources to accomplish staff development goals identified. (Page 183)

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DEI/Disability Resource Coordinators

ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE–STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM
UNIVERSAL ACCESS: A SUSTAINED EFFORT Building on two rounds of funding under the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI), initial steps to provide more comprehensive physical and programmatic access have begun. The Disability Employment Initiative has increased understanding of sensitivity to the complexity of universal access. Given limited human and financial resources, Maine proposes to chart a five year course of improvement leading to institutionalized practices that ensure and sustain universal access. A universal access working group composed of key personnel will be established to implement this effort. Initially, the group will have wide representation that includes the required WIOA partners, related partners/providers, and subject matter experts with backgrounds in accessibility, accommodations, and special populations. Working group membership/representation will be fluid, based on the issue or need being addressed. A universal access coordinator will lead the work group. This dedicated staff position in the Bureau of Employment Services will provide technical assistance to aid the one–stop centers in achieving and sustaining universal access. This Bureau oversees physical access to one–stop centers, the customer complaint resolution process, policy development that affects the delivery of services, and monitoring/certification of one–stop centers. The universal access coordinator will provide technical assistance to aid the one–stop centers in achieving and sustaining universal access. (Page 109)

DVR assisted MDOL’s Bureau of Employment Services in obtaining a Disability Employment Initiative Grant to continue work successfully started under Maine’s Disability Program Navigator Grant. In October 2013, the state was awarded another three–year round of DEI funding but its focus is on a different area of the state. Designed to improve CareerCenter services and programs for people with disabilities in targeted regions of the state, Maine’s DEI grant work includes operating a statewide workforce employment network providing Ticket to Work services to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. The DEI grant is collecting limited data on individuals served by the grant. One objective of the grant is to conduct Integrated Resource Team (IRT) meetings on individuals with unmet needs that are impacting employment. To motivate CareerCenter counselors and case managers to enroll people with disabilities in employment and training programs, particularly WIOA–supported services, the grant offers training and supportive services funds to WIOA–enrolled people with disabilities. These funds supplement existing dollars and are designed to help CareerCenters maximize the likelihood of a successful employment outcome. The funds, which are known as the Flexible Employment Fund (FEF), require an IRT to convene, thus encouraging an integrated, or unified, approach to employment services. (Page 264)

Objective: Maine DVR will continue to partner with Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to include 50 non–VR CareerCenter customers with disabilities in Career Exploration Workshops Strategies in FFY 2016 (Page 282)

- a. The DEI team will include one VR Rehabilitation Counselor I who will assist in piloting a jointly–delivered Career Exploration Workshop
- b. DVR will participate in DEI Integrated Resource Team meetings
- c. DVR will work with the DEI team and others in the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure accessibility in Maine’s CareerCenter network
- d. DVR will partner with DEI staff in the delivery of an asset development summit in FY 2016 (Page 282)

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Objective: Maine DVR will partner with Maine's Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to increase the numbers of non-VR CareerCenter customers with disabilities who participate in Career Exploration Workshops from 3 in FY 2011 to 10 in FY 2012 to 25 in FY 2013. (Page 301)

Objective: DBVI will partner with Maine's Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to identify non-VR CareerCenter customers who are blind or have low vision who may require DBVI services.

Strategies: Maine DBVI will work with a designated point of contact with the Bureau of Employment Services.

Update: There has been a small but impactful interaction with DBVI customers, primarily around something referred to under the DEI grant objectives as Accelerated Resource Coordination (ARC). During an ARC, customers will meet with a team within a CareerCenter made up of DEI coordinators, members of BES, or NMDC, or DVR, or DBVI to find a solution to a customer's immediate, pressing need. In most cases DEI's involvement has been to use its Flexible Employment Fund (FEF) to financially assist the customers to overcome a barrier in order to continue going to their job or finding employment. (Page 416)

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Other State Programs/Pilots that Support Competitive Integrated Employment

- Partner with an employer(s) and postsecondary academic institution and/or training provider to develop and deliver the IET curriculum and delivery model based on identified employer needs;
- Inform and/or collaborate with the boards of the local workforce development areas designated pursuant to the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Public Law 105–220, business education partnerships, postsecondary educational institutions, and career counselors for the purpose of addressing the challenges of connecting disadvantaged adults to careers; and,
- Recruit and train a diverse pool of persons seeking jobs, including veterans, and individuals with barriers to employment; Integrate employability skills training that meet the needs of the employer (i.e. integrated WorkReady) (Page 197)

Financial Literacy/Economic Advancement

...allowable statewide employment & training activities to facilitate the successful transition and implementation of WIOA, Statewide employment & training activities include:

- Rapid Response activities;
 - Providing assistance to State entities and agencies, local areas, and one-stop partners in carrying out the activities described in the State plan, including the coordination and alignment of data systems used to carry out the requirements of this Act;
 - Disseminating the State list of eligible providers of training services, including eligible providers of nontraditional training services and of apprenticeship programs, and information identifying eligible providers of on-the-job training, customized training, incumbent worker training, internships, paid or unpaid work experience opportunities, or transitional jobs;
 - Operating a fiscal and management accountability information system and carrying out monitoring and oversight of activities;
 - Implementing innovative programs and strategies designed to meet the needs of all Maine employers, as well as developing strategies for effectively serving individuals with barriers to employment and for coordinating programs and services among one-stop partners;
 - Improving coordination of employment and training activities with child support services, programs that serve individuals with disabilities, adult education and literacy activities, including financial literacy and activities in the corrections system that assist ex-offenders in reentering the workforce;
 - Conducting research and demonstration projects related to meeting the employment and education needs of adult and dislocated workers in Maine. (Page 141)
- Research-based Instruction – STAR, Adult Numeracy Initiative, Integrated Education and Training, College and Career Readiness Standards, Reading Apprenticeship Program.

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- Support Services – Support services improve persistence and student success, especially for students with barriers, as they progress through education and training programs and transition into employment. Adult education programs are expected to have Memorandum of Understanding with related agencies capable of providing services such as; employment services, transportation, childcare, financial literacy and community linkages (i.e. substance abuse counseling, mental health system services and housing.),
- Data Management – Maine Adult Education strives to promote the use of data to inform programming and instructional practices. Local programs are required to enter and maintain all program data in Maine’s managed information system, MaineSTARS, with the expectation that program services will be guided by student achievement and persistence data as well as current local labor market and employment data to ensure programming meets the needs of the local community. Learner data to be collected and maintained includes demographic, assessment, participation, and outcome data. Program data reports are due in the fall, in the spring, and at the end of the academic year. Local programs outline data management practices and needs as well as data driven programming decisions in the annual Career Pathways plan.
- Program Monitoring and Evaluation – MAE uses a continuous improvement monitoring process at that state level to determine effectiveness of local programs. The State’s data system is National Reporting System compliant and allows for real-time viewing of program data. Complete details regarding the State’s assessment and monitoring system are included in the Assessing Quality section of this plan. (Page 193)

Benefits

Section H – Interagency Cooperation SRC: The SRC supports and commends DVR in their efforts to foster collaborative relationships and coordinated services with the Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, as well as in connecting VR consumers with Benefits Counseling Services. However, the SRC recommends that DVR undertake outreach efforts with the Office of Family Independence, which is responsible for determining eligibility for MaineCare, Maine’s state Medicaid plan. All services from OADS and SAMHS flow from MaineCare eligibility, and OFI policy changes and initiatives greatly impact service provision and employment outcomes for VR consumers. As such, VR consumers would benefit greatly from education and involvement of OFI officials in the coordination of services to support employment for people with disabilities. (Page 226)

SRC: In section on “Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling”: Additionally through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s benefits counseling network DVR has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program.” How are these individuals being served through DBVI? What role does DVR play?

AGENCY RESPONSE: Just as DVR clients are able to access Benefits Counseling Services and be served with provisions through MaineCare, DBVI clients are able to participate in and benefit from these services. Some examples of utilizing MaineCare to overcome barriers to employment are mental health counseling; low vision evaluations; personal support services. (Page 231)

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AGENCY RESPONSE: The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is proposing to make changes to some MaineCare services through a 1915 (i) State Plan Amendment, also known as an iSPA. In this iSPA, Maine intends to streamline delivery systems and prioritize community and work-based habilitation support for adults. An iSPA provides states with greater autonomy and flexibility for providing services to Medicaid members while maintaining compliance with the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The proposed changes will affect the following sections of MaineCare policy: Section 2, Adult Family Care Services; Section 17, Community Support Services; Section 26, Day Health Services; Section 97, Private Non-Medical Institutions DHHS is also proposing to add the following services to the MaineCare Benefits Manual: Benefits Counseling; Career Planning; Psycho-Social Club House; Residential Habilitation; Supported Employment-Individualized (O) State's Strategies (Goals 3, 4 and 5) (Page 234)

AGENCY RESPONSE: There are increases to spending in services provided to clients through the Milestone payment process; likewise, there are benefits and improvements noted. A more thorough evaluation of the costs and benefit analysis and a determination to make adjustments to the existing process will be forthcoming. (Page 235)

DVR continues to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine's benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DVR applicants and eligible clients. This allowed the services to remain intact while a resolution was determined on a federal level as to the continuation of this critical service in 2013. DVR currently administers a single contract with Maine's approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center's Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, and Office of Aging and Disability Services. The contract's scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Center's Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services' Disability Employment Initiative (Page 241-242)

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine's benefits counseling network DVR has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State's Medicaid program. DVR entered into the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus agreement with the Bureau of Employment Services in July 2014. The purpose of this agreement is to strengthen the partnerships within CareerCenters in the provision of vocational rehabilitation and employment and training services to individuals with disabilities seeking employment in Maine. This agreement expands service options and the overall capacity of Maine's workforce investment activities and offers individuals the opportunity to achieve employment outcomes, decrease reliance on public benefits and increase personal economic assets and resources. (Page 251)

As outlined in Section 606 (Employment of Individuals with Disabilities) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Maine DVR continually makes "positive efforts to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities in programs assisted under this title". Currently 25 Transition VR Counselors are assigned to work with the more than

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200 Maine High Schools, as well as with out-of-school youth and youth attending private institutions. Transition-aged youth represent nearly one third of all DVR cases in Maine and one of the fastest growing populations served by DVR. Maine DVR has a Statewide Transition Counselor Advisory Group that meets quarterly to promote best practices in the provision of VR transition services. During the last year, this group heard from a number of guest speakers on disability and employment issues – including benefits counseling – and focused much of its efforts on WIOA (Page 260)

- In addition to providing ongoing employment support to more than 200 employed individuals with mental illness through contracts with CRP's, the DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) has a number of initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve. SAMHS and OADS are coordinating the use of Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative includes training for Work and Benefits Navigators, an Employment 101 curriculum, and training in Individual Placement and Support /Supported Employment (Page 262)
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REPORT ON PROGRESS: Monitoring of expenditures and employment outcomes is occurring; a detailed analysis is in early stages with the assistance of Management Analyst II hired during FFY 15. Using the Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) expenditures from SFY 2012 as a baseline and comparing it to SFY 2015 expenditures, there was an increase of total expenditures for CRP services of \$655, 453; which equates to a 22.5% increase in spending. Using the same baseline data information, comparing SFY 2012 to SFY 2015, 263 less clients were referred to and received services from CRPs and there were 9 less CRP successful closures. Cost per successful closure was \$11,345 in SFY 2012 and \$14,412 in SFY 2015 or in an increase per client of \$3,067. Costs for all clients served by CRPs in SFY 2012 were \$1,169 and in SFY 2015 \$1,602, an increase of \$433 per client. Improvements were noted in service time length from Eligibility to Employment and from Eligibility to Closure during the same SFY comparison and closure trends showed an increase in the rehabilitation rate, comparing successful closures to unsuccessful closures, of 5.7% points. Another area of note is the number of authorizations created by Support Staff during the same time period decreased by 1,275; this demonstrates a decrease in workload for administrative staff within the agency and has implications for improvements throughout the State of Maine payment system and process. As noted above, there are increases to spending in services provided to clients through the Milestone payment process; likewise, there are benefits and improvements noted. A more thorough evaluation of the costs and benefit analysis and a determination to make adjustments to the existing process will be forthcoming. (Page 297)

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Additionally, DBVI/DVR, OADS and SAMHS have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state.

- Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling DBVI/DVR continue to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine's benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DBVI applicants and eligible clients. This allowed the services to remain intact while a resolution was determined on a federal level as to the continuation of this critical service in 2013. DBVI/DVR currently administer a single contract with Maine's approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center's Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, and Office of Aging and Disability Services. The contract's scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Center's Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services' Disability Employment Initiative.(Page 336)
- DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services and DVR MOU (updated August 2013) "This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence-based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities." Additionally through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine's benefits counseling network with BRS, DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State's Medicaid program. (Page 345)

At this time, approximately 3,000 working-age MaineCare waiver recipients are not working but are being asked about their interest and desire to move toward employment. Additionally through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine's benefits counseling network, DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State's Medicaid program. (Page 346)

BRS entered into the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus agreement with the Bureau of Employment Services in July 2014. The purpose of this agreement is to strengthen the partnerships within CareerCenters in the provision of vocational rehabilitation and employment and training services to individuals with disabilities seeking employment in Maine. This agreement expands service options and the overall capacity of Maine's workforce investment activities and offers individuals the opportunity to achieve employment outcomes, decrease reliance on public benefits and increase personal economic assets and resources. (Page 346)

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The worker receives the same pay and health benefits as other workers, but does not accumulate seniority time. If at any time during this year the supervisor deems the worker has performed their duties satisfactorily, he/she will be placed in the position as a new employee and the usual probationary period will begin. A unique feature of this initiative is that the Human Resources Department throughout all of state government is centrally connected to this process, which allows for people with disabilities from anywhere within the state to be contacted at the very first point the state becomes aware that there will be an open position. In this manner we can recruit from across a comprehensive network to fill vacancies within DBVI, as long as they meet the qualifications of our position. The Division has one employee that began state employment by utilizing the special appointment process. It has proven to be a very successful job match for this individual challenges. (Page 354)

The report discusses a variety of benefits related to local access to center-based, immersion model blindness rehabilitation as a key component of Maine's overall delivery system. The most important of these advantages is the ability to provide immediate, comprehensive training and application with a wide variety of fundamental and essential blindness skills and devices. Being able to provide this comprehensive training in this fashion can increase the pace of acquisition of these basic blindness skills which then will decrease the time needed between eligibility for DBVI services to being prepared to integrate these newly learned skills into an employment setting. (Page 363)

Average cost per closure in FFY 2012–2014. The bottom-line in determining cost benefits with regard to rehabilitation services is what it costs an agency like DBVI to provide services and successfully close an individual who needed those services. The following table details average costs per closure based on information drawn from the DBVI case tracking system; (Page 377)

Limited transportation makes it hard to find and keep an appropriate job. In addition to contributing to the high poverty levels among people with disabilities, unemployment in its turn, combined with disability benefits that are too meager to provide discretionary income, make the available transportation unaffordable. Gaps in transportation also entail social costs, including reduced access to blindness services, especially for clients living in the more remote areas. (Page 385)

Six individuals were employed and they indicated their job income was the primary source they relied on to pay their daily living expenses. Four individuals received retirement benefits, five received SSDI benefits and six received SSI benefits that they used to contribute towards their living expenses. (Page 390)

Rehabilitation Counselor I (ILS) 2 1 Total Responses 42 Staff Perceptions of the Needs of People with Visual Impairments. The staff's responses to a query about what they believed the greatest needs of people with visual impairments in Maine were unsurprisingly similar to responses received in the consumer and staff focus groups. They believed that access to transportation and employment were the greatest needs, followed closely by access to assistive technology. The next cluster of items were access to personal adjustment counseling, peer support, and disability-specific skills training. The third cluster of items included access to computer training, low vision device fitting and training, career development, education and training options, and job search skills training. The final cluster included access to information, housing, mental health counseling, benefits counseling, and medical interventions. Table 3.11 presents all of the staff responses

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concerning the greatest needs of people with visual impairments in Maine. Table 3.11 Greatest Needs of People with VI in Maine % n Access to transportation 83 39 Access to employment. (Page 397)

School to Work Transition

No specific disability related information found.

Data Collection

- a. Enhance digital literacy skills (as defined in sec 202 of the Museum and Library Services Act (20 U.S.C. 9101); referred to in this Act as “digital literacy skills”);
 - b. Accelerate the acquisition of skills and recognized postsecondary credentials by participants;
 - c. Strengthen the professional development of providers and workforce professionals; and
 - d. Ensure such technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities and individuals residing in remote areas;
- 8) The development of strategies for aligning technology and data systems across one–stop partner programs to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies in reporting on performance accountability measures (including the design and implementation of common intake, data collection, case management information and performance accountability measurement, and reporting processes, and the incorporation of local input into such design and implementation, to improve coordination of services across one–stop partner programs);
 - 9) The development of allocation formulas for the distribution of funds for employment and training activities for adults and youth workforce investment activities to local areas as permitted under sections 128(b)(3) and 133(b)(3);
 - 10) The preparation of annual reports described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 116(d);
 - 11) The development of the statewide workforce and labor market information system described in section (Page 42)

Adult Education uses MaineSTARS, Vocational Rehabilitation utilizes AWARE, and Wagner–Peyser and formula program providers utilize a combination of systems, including the One Stop Operating System (OSOS) and the Maine Job Bank (MJB), a labor exchange system. The aforementioned systems comply with current federal reporting requirements for each program. The data elements required for each program are being collected and will be used to support the coordinated implementation of Maine’s strategic objectives. MaineSTARS is a federally approved MIS system compliant with adult education’s National Reporting System. Local adult education programs are required to use MaineSTARS for all intake, demographic, assessment, and attendance data. At the state level, aggregate numbers are compiled in MaineSTARS and used to perform data matches against Maine Department of Labor employment data, high school equivalency completion data, and the National Student Clearinghouse database for postsecondary enrollment. (Page 73)

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Small Business/Entrepreneurship

The Division works collaboratively with the University of Southern Maine/Maine Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), and Coastal Enterprise, Inc. (CEI) a private, nonprofit Community Development Corporation in assisting and supporting VR consumers who are interested in self-employment opportunities. A work group that consists of statewide representatives from SBDC, DBVI and Client Assistance Program (CAP) meet on a quarterly basis to discuss, explore and identify areas of strengths or concerns regarding small business ownership for our consumers. This group reviews the process for continuous improvement and to ensure the success of the VR client with his/her employment goal. This work has resulted in more solid employment goals involved in self-employment as part of a well-defined business plan. DBVI/DVR and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have two Memorandums of Understanding (MOU); one MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services, which serves individuals with developmental disabilities; the other MOU is with the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) which serves individuals with mental health issues. (Page 335-336)

In the previous year, DBVI made continuous efforts to seek and identify enhanced learning opportunities, particularly through use of distance learning modalities, in providing educational forums for its staff. Videoconferencing capacity has been established on a statewide basis and has led to an extensive learning collaborative with DVR, the Career Center One Stops, and the Social Security Administration, external partners such as Maine CITE, the Small Business Development Corporation, and the local workforce development boards. DBVI staff also takes advantage of distance training opportunities through webinars and teleconferences such as those offered by Workforce One, Independent Living Research Utilization, Social Security Administration, Rehabilitation Services Administration, TACE center and Parent Education Advocacy Training Center. (Page 352-353)

Career Pathways

No specific disability related information found.

Employment Networks

Examples of immediate policy priorities include assistive technology and equipment responsibility, website/social media accessibility, programmatic and physical accessibility of workshops and events, service animal protocols, customer flow for the employment network, prohibition of automatic referrals to vocational rehabilitation, alternative formats for required tests/assessments, and consistent use of equal employment and accommodations tag lines. Program participation rules governing required orientation workshops, the RESEA program, and other mandatory programs will be examined to ensure full accessibility, especially access to alternative formats and accommodations. The feasibility of a central accommodations fund and various ways of ensuring/maintaining its solvency will also be explored. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OTHER CHALLENGES TO ACCESS Maine is a leader among states in ensuring that domestic violence victims have legal protections to avoid job loss and loss of unemployment insurance benefits due to domestic violence counseling, treatment and court appointments. (Page 111)

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The Bureau of Employment Services will also continue to operate a Ticket-to-Work workforce employment network through the one-stops, ensuring that people receiving federal SSI and DI benefits are served by the workforce system. One-stop managers will designate at least one Ticket-to-Work specialist in each office. (Page 112)

Co-location in Maine's network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One-Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with a number of other programs that are components of the statewide workforce investment system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. In October of 2010, DVR assisted MDOL's Bureau of Employment Services in obtaining a Disability Employment Initiative Grant to continue work successfully started under Maine's Disability Program Navigator Grant. In October 2013, the state was awarded another three-year round of DEI funding but its focus is on a different area of the state. Designed to improve CareerCenter services and programs for people with disabilities in targeted regions of the state, Maine's DEI grant work includes operating a statewide workforce employment network providing Ticket to Work services to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. The DEI grant is collecting limited data on individuals served by the grant. One objective of the grant is to conduct Integrated Resource Team (IRT) meetings on individuals with unmet needs that are impacting employment. To motivate CareerCenter counselors and case managers to enroll people with disabilities in employment and training programs, particularly WIOA-supported services, the grant offers training and supportive services funds to WIOA-enrolled people with disabilities. These funds supplement existing dollars and are designed to help CareerCenters maximize the likelihood of a successful employment outcome. The funds, which are known as the Flexible Employment Fund (FEF), require an IRT to convene, thus encouraging an integrated, or unified, approach to employment services. (Page 264)

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- Public awareness workshops that bring together people with vision loss and potential employers is another vehicle for showing employers that people with vision loss "can do things" and for educating consumers about employers' needs and expectations.
- Forging connections between young people with vision loss and local employers should begin in high school and college, some participants said. Paid work, internships, and volunteer work help young people to start developing an employment network for the future, begin teaching them what employers want, and demonstrate their value in the work

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environment. Connections to other people with vision loss. Social isolation is a big problem for many of the focus group participants. It is a problem in its own right (discussed in the next section) but also might contribute to difficulty in finding meaningful work. Having a limited social network reduces the chances of receiving job leads and learning from others' employment experiences. (Page 384)

* All enclosed information is cited directly from final state plan as of February 23, 2017

Find your local state plans here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/state-plans/index.html>