

# **GRANITE STATE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT**

## **An Overview of Employment Infrastructure Improvements and A Guide for the Future**



December, 2012

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**Community Bridges**  
**Moore Center Services, Inc**  
**One Sky Community Services**  
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**Genesis Behavioral Health**  
**Riverbend Community Mental Health Center**  
**Monadnock Family Services**  
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**Seacoast Mental Health Center, Inc.**  
**Center for Life Management**  
**People First of NH**

**UNH, Institute on Disability**  
**Keene State College**  
**Southwestern Community College**  
**Southern NH University**  
**Granite State Independent Living**  
**Great Bay Community College**  
**ACCESS**  
**Harbor Homes**  
**The PLUS Company**  
**Opportunity Networks**  
**CORE Vocational Services**  
**NAMI NH**  
**Strafford Learning Center**  
**NH Forum on the Future**  
**St. Joseph's Hospital**  
**Concord Hospital**  
**Cheshire Medical Center**  
**Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital**  
**Catholic Medical Center**  
**Portsmouth Regional Hospital**  
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## FOREWORD

In 2007 the State of New Hampshire was awarded a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for the Granite State Employment Project to develop a comprehensive approach for improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The multi-year federal grant provided opportunities to pilot new initiatives, promote best practices, and significantly improve collaboration across service systems. The project also forged strong partnerships with service agencies, the business community, and citizens with disabilities and their families. Stakeholders from across New Hampshire have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to support meaningful employment opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their disability, the system that provides their services, or where they live.

With its work on the Granite State Employment Project, New Hampshire is primed to become an Employment First State. *What does this mean, you may ask?* An Employment First State is one where employment is the first and preferred outcome for all publicly funded services provided to working age individuals with disabilities, regardless of the type or level of their disability. Employment First is a national movement that has been gaining momentum. People with disabilities, family members, advocates, and many others are taking a stand for expanded access to employment and improved wage equality that enables individuals with disabilities to move out of poverty.

While lasting change does not occur overnight, we believe that the key initiatives funded through the Granite State Employment Project have set the stage for providing access to higher quality and better coordinated employment support services. These improvements to the statewide service infrastructure are leading to progressively better outcomes for New Hampshire residents with disabilities. We are committed to continuing this effort and will work to ensure that as New Hampshire moves into the future, employment for people with disabilities is a priority for our state.

Denise Sleeper  
*Director*  
*Granite State Employment Project*

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## I. BACKGROUND

Over the past five years our state has engaged in a collaborative effort to improve vocational supports and services and employment outcomes for New Hampshire's youth and adults with disabilities. With funding from a federal Medicaid Infrastructure Act, the Granite State Employment Project brought together the business community, secondary and post-secondary education systems, community-based services, individuals with disabilities, and their families to work on initiatives that have brought about needed changes in our employment service system and significantly improved employment outcomes for residents with disabilities.

The Granite State Employment Project is one of several Medicaid Infrastructure Grants New Hampshire has received over the past 12 years. These federal grants are authorized under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TTWIIA), a comprehensive, cross disability policy effort to remove systemic barriers to employment. Specifically, the Act called for the following:

- ▶ **Ticket to Work Program**, a voluntary program of the Social Security Administration that helps Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries explore employment options and receive support in order to find and maintain employment. The goal of the program is to help people earn enough money to transition off Social Security benefits.
- ▶ **Elimination of Work Disincentives**, including the establishment of the Expedited Reinstatement of Benefits, Work Incentives Outreach programs, and Protection and Advocacy services for beneficiaries.

*Over the past five years our state has engaged in a collaborative effort to improve vocational supports and services and employment outcomes for New Hampshire's youth and adults with disabilities.*

- ▶ **Expansion of Healthcare Coverage** through a State Plan Amendment that incorporates the Medicaid Buy-In program for people who work that due to earned income, would no longer qualify for SSDI and SSI. The Medicaid Buy-In program allows changes in financial resource and income limits and a continuation of Medicaid coverage for workers on a sliding scale basis.

- ▶ **Demonstration Projects and Research Studies**

The 1999 Act required federal agencies, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Labor to establish these programs at the federal level and to work with states to create state infrastructures to implement TTWIIA programs for persons with disabilities and to address systemic barriers to employment.

Since the passage of TTWIIA, New Hampshire has been awarded several grants from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Social Security Administration. The State's initial federal grant focused on the expansion of Personal Assistance Services, and the creation of MEAD (Medicaid for Employed

Adults with Disabilities), a program that allows Medicaid buy-in for adults with disabilities who are working and who would not otherwise be financially eligible for Medicaid. New Hampshire also received a two-year planning grant to study and develop strategies for systemic changes in employment services. Work done through the planning grant, qualified New Hampshire for a four-year comprehensive Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, the Granite State Employment Project.

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### State Level Change

As a result of the passage of the TWWIIA of 1999, New Hampshire made several improvements to its disability service systems. These included:

- ▶ Passage in June 2001 of New Hampshire Work Incentive legislation (RSA 167:66, IX) and the subsequent establishment of the MEAD program. MEAD allows an individual to earn a net income of up to a 450% of the federal poverty level and save employment earnings up to \$25,391 without losing access to Medicaid health coverage. MEAD facilitates entry into the workforce for individuals with disabilities and enables them to become contributing taxpaying members of their communities.
- ▶ Revision of State rule He-P 601 to improve access to personal care services by expanding the agencies that are certified to provide personal care services. This has been especially beneficial for individuals who need personal care services provided at their place of employment.
- ▶ Amendment to New Hampshire's Medicaid State Plan to make personal care services available to those individuals who qualify for the MEAD program. This change in the State Plan ensures that lack of personal care services is not an obstacle for those individuals who want to work.
- ▶ Expanding supports at six of the New Hampshire Employment Security One-Stop Centers to include trained benefit specialists and work incentives counselors.
- ▶ Providing 13 New Hampshire Employment Security One-Stop Centers with resources and materials to make them more accessible to job seekers who have disabilities.

These improvements prepared the foundation for the Granite State Employment Project and the development of a comprehensive employment support system for New Hampshire residents with disabilities.

### II. IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Surveys and studies conducted as part of the 2004-2006 Strategic Planning Medicaid Infrastructure Grant identified the following challenges and barriers to improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities:

- ▶ New Hampshire lacked the strong leadership, shared vision, and collaborative partnerships that are crucial to bringing about systemic change.
- ▶ There was no unified message to the New Hampshire business community about the value of hiring workers with disabilities. The wide variety of approaches used by service providers was confusing to employers and produced mixed results in regards to employment outcomes for people with disabilities.
- ▶ New Hampshire did not have enough well-trained, highly-qualified job developers and employment consultants. The system would need to invest resources to provide basic training in core competency areas, as well as advanced training for veteran staff.
- ▶ Flexible, alternative, funding mechanisms would be needed to implement evidence-based supported employment for individuals with mental illness and to remove financial disincentives to supported employment providers in the developmental services system.
- ▶ New Hampshire's secondary education system lacked effective vocational education, skill building, and transition planning for young adults with disabilities. The majority of students with disabilities leaving high school had limited or no employment experience. Students with disabilities needed meaningful work opportunities during their school years before transitioning to the adult workforce.
- ▶ There was a need for reliable and standardized employment data across service systems, provider organizations, and State agencies. While a

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number of community-based agencies collected employment-related data, the information being tracked varied considerably across systems and was often anecdotal in nature. New Hampshire would need reliable, consistent data in order to identify problems, make needed changes, and assess whether these changes were resulting in improved outcomes for persons with disabilities.

- ▶ Nationally, industry-based workforce development strategies have demonstrated positive outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers. However, in New Hampshire these models were untapped or under-utilized for workers with disabilities. The state would benefit from working with targeted industries to develop successful practices to benefit workers with disabilities.

### III. THE GRANITE STATE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

Based on the work done through the Strategic Planning grant, New Hampshire applied for and was awarded a federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant for the Granite State Employment Project to remove systemic barriers to employment for youth and adults with disabilities.

The project engaged a wide variety of stakeholders from across New Hampshire to develop a comprehensive approach for tackling the state's challenges to employment. Stakeholders included representatives from the Bureau of Developmental Services, Bureau of Behavioral Health, the Department of Education and New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Support Network, Inc., Private Provider Network, Granite State Independent Living, People First, National Alliance for Mental Illness, area agencies, community mental health centers, as well as individuals with disabilities and their families.

#### Mission and Vision

Stakeholders began by developing a Mission Statement for the project and laying out a vision of what they hoped the project would accomplish over the five-year course of the grant.

#### Granite State Employment Project Mission Statement

*To improve employment opportunities for New Hampshire citizens with disabilities so that they may fully participate in and better contribute to their communities.*

#### Vision of Granite State Employment Project Accomplishments

- ▶ The development of a statewide infrastructure with well-trained staff that provides high quality employment supports and services to individuals with disabilities.
- ▶ Support for an employment infrastructure that is responsive both to the needs of individuals with disabilities and to employers.
- ▶ A strong partnership with New Hampshire's business community to expand and improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- ▶ Collaboration with schools to ensure students with disabilities receive effective transition services that result in employment or in post-secondary education that leads to employment.
- ▶ Policies, rules, and funding associated with employment services that are in accord with employment best practices.
- ▶ A transparent employment database to inform individuals, families, policy makers, providers, and funders about regional employment issues and outcomes.

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### Project Approach

The Bureau of Developmental Services administered the Granite State Employment Project. Two leadership groups – the State Project Team and the Project Steering Committee – were established to develop and guide the project. The State Project Team included project personnel and staff members from the Vocational Rehabilitation, Bureau of Behavioral Health, Bureau of Developmental Services, Department of Education, and Department of Employment Security. The Project Steering Committee included representatives from peer support and self-advocacy organizations, advocacy and provider agencies, and staff from State agencies, colleges, and universities who were engaged in employment issues.

In developing the Strategic Plan, project leadership took into account New Hampshire's long tradition of local control. The State's social service systems are managed at the regional, rather than the State level. This de-centralized approach has served New Hampshire well. With local leadership and decision-making authority, regional services are better able to respond directly to needs, apply local solutions to problems, and access local resources. With this in mind, project leadership worked with two Lead Agencies – Gateways Community Services serving the greater Nashua area and Monadnock Developmental Services serving southwestern New Hampshire.

The two Lead Agencies, with input from their Local Steering Committees and Local Project Teams, developed a comprehensive plan for their region, identifying goals, strategies, and activities to strengthen the service infrastructure and improve employment outcomes. The State Planning Team reviewed the regional plans and with representatives from Gateways and Monadnock Developmental Services deliberated extensively about how to enhance the capacity of employment services in all regions of the state. On October 11, 2007, a daylong planning ses-

sion was held to develop the statewide plan. The meeting was attended by members of all project teams, and facilitated by Health and Disability Advocates, a national technical assistance and training center.

As a result of these planning efforts, the following five strategic priorities were selected for the Granite State Employment Project:

1. Outreach and Partnership with Employers
2. Employment and Transition Services for Students
3. Enhancing Staff Training and Professional Development Opportunities
4. Employment Data Collection, Analysis, and Application
5. Enhancing Policies, Rules, and Funding Arrangements for Employment Services

In addition, stakeholders identified the following key characteristics that should be part of any effective employment services infrastructure.

- ▶ Ability to meet the employment needs and desires of persons with disabilities
- ▶ Supports and services that lead to increased income, independence, and personal responsibility for the individuals being served
- ▶ Cost effective delivery of services and support
- ▶ Capacity to build community connections

Both Gateways and Monadnock Developmental Services, with input from their Local Steering Committees and Local Project Teams, developed successful local initiatives that were later replicated statewide. These included: a professional marketing campaign promoting the value of hiring workers with disabilities, innovative sector-based training programs for youth with disabilities, and regional workforce coalitions. The contributions of these two Lead Agencies to the success of the Granite State Employment Project cannot be overstated.

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### IV. RESULTS FROM MAJOR PROJECT INITIATIVES

#### Strategic Priority 1: Outreach and Partnership with Employers

The Granite State Employment Project worked at both local and state levels to promote the development of effective business and employment service provider partnerships. Efforts included the creation of the annual New Hampshire Employment Leadership Awards, an effective public relations marketing campaign, and expanded workforce models to meet labor demands for employers.

#### Employer Outreach

##### *New Hampshire Employment Leadership Awards*

In 2009 the project created the annual New Hampshire Employment Leadership Award to recognize businesses in the state that have demonstrated excellence in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities. Nominations are made by employment service providers and submitted to the Award Planning Committee whose review includes site visits. Since 2009, twenty businesses have been honored with the New Hampshire Employment Leadership Award. At the 2012 New Hampshire Employment Leadership Award Breakfast, Governor John Lynch presented the awards to the winning employers.

##### *New Hampshire Employment Leadership Award Winners*

- ▶ CalLogix Inc. (2009)
- ▶ Dartmouth-Hitchcock Nashua (2009)
- ▶ Keene State College (2009)
- ▶ Sheraton Harborside Hotel Portsmouth (2009)
- ▶ St. Joseph Hospital (2009)
- ▶ Breven Electronics (2010)
- ▶ CEJ Computer Business Systems, LLC (2010)
- ▶ Hannaford Stores (2010)
- ▶ Havenwood-Heritage Heights (2010)
- ▶ Johnson Precision Amherst (2010)
- ▶ Astronics (2011)
- ▶ The Barley House (2011)
- ▶ Concord Hospital (2011)
- ▶ Lowe's (2011)
- ▶ RKM (2011)
- ▶ Constantly Pizza-Concord (2012)
- ▶ Dartmouth-Hitchcock Hospital Manchester (2012)
- ▶ Kellermeyer Bergensons Services (KBS) – National (2012)
- ▶ Sodexo Inc. at St. Joseph Hospital (2012)
- ▶ Murdawg Custom (2012)

#### Public Relation Efforts

**Let's Work Together NH** website is part of a state-wide coordinated marketing effort, that showcases Employment Leadership Award recipients and links employers to resources on hiring, retaining, and successfully integrating people with disabilities into the workplace. The site has links to variety state and national initiatives. Site visitors can download information and materials, including an Employer Guide. [www.nhletsworktogether.org](http://www.nhletsworktogether.org).

**I Am Success/We Are Success** is a highly professional marketing campaign developed by Church and Main Advertising in partnership with Monadnock Center for Successful Transitions (a program of Monadnock Developmental Services, one of the project's two Lead Agencies). *I Am Success* highlights individuals with disabilities employed in a wide variety of industries. *We Are Success*, features employers who have hired workers with disabilities and includes resources and materials directed to the business community. The campaign also created promotional materials for New Hampshire's regional workforce development coalitions. The coalitions were established as part of the Granite State Employment Project to expand vocational opportunities for individuals with disabilities and to serve as a resource to the businesses in their communities.

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**Think Beyond the Label**, funded by the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, is a national marketing campaign with a simple message – hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense. The Granite State Employment Project is partnering with the New Hampshire Division for Resources and Economic Development and Vocational Rehabilitation to promote *Think Beyond the Label* with New Hampshire businesses. A link to *Think Beyond the Label* also is found on the Let's Work Together NH website.

**The New Hampshire Business Review** is a statewide biweekly business publication with a print edition reaching 50,000 subscribers. *The New Hampshire Business Review* promotes the annual New Hampshire Employment Leadership Awards prior to the event and in October dedicates a multi-page centerfold highlighting the award winning businesses.

**Business NH Magazine** and the New Hampshire Chamber of Commerce recognized New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation as the 2012 Business Assistance Organization of the Year.

**New Hampshire Forum on the Future** is an alliance of business, education, and public policy leaders committed to ensuring a highly educated and well-trained New Hampshire workforce. For three years, Granite State Employment Project has been a Forum sponsor; one benefit of sponsorship is a link to Let's Work Together on the Forum's website [www.nhfuture.org](http://www.nhfuture.org). Representatives from the project also participate in Forum events. At the Forum breakfast, *New Hampshire's Outlook In the Midst of Economic Uncertainty*, the project was represented on a panel

with leadership from New Hampshire Employment Security, the state's Community College System, and Fidelity Investments. The panel discussed emerging opportunities for employers and workers with disabilities that highlighted innovative workforce development models and business partnerships with New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation.

### **Partnerships with Employers through Sector-Based Employment Initiatives**

Creating strong partnerships with the state's business community, education, government, and service providers was critical to transforming New Hampshire's employment services system. During the grant, the project supported the development and replication of a number of sector-based workforce development models. For two of these new models – Project SEARCH and STRIDE – the project formed local Business Advisory Councils to expand access to the business community, provide mentoring opportunities, and increase job placements for workers with disabilities. The Business Advisory Councils have been vital to the success of these initiatives. In addition, the Granite State Employment Project worked with Great Bay Community College to offer two sector-based training programs through the community college system.

**Business NH Magazine and the New Hampshire Chamber of Commerce recognized New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation as the 2012 Business Assistance Organization of the Year.**

### **First Course**

First Course, founded in 2007, was a collaborative effort by Monadnock Developmental Services (a Lead Agency for the Granite State Employment Project), the Keene Housing Authority, Monadnock Family

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Services, and Southwestern Community Services. First Course provided job training for individuals with disabilities and those in disadvantaged circumstances. Trainees in the 16-week program received classroom instruction in the culinary arts and gained practical work experience through internships in professional kitchens. First Course prepared graduates for occupations in food service, as prep cooks, kitchen assistants, wait staff, cashiers, and servers. All graduates received a certificate and were provided with job development services following graduation. In May 2011, the program graduated its fifteenth and final class, bringing the total number of First Course graduates to 48. Of those graduating, more than 85% have found employment in food services.

## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 48 individuals have graduated from First Course
- ▶ Employment rate for First Course graduates: 85%

## **Project SEARCH**

Project SEARCH is a copyrighted and internationally trademarked school-to-work model that was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Project SEARCH is a workplace immersion experience for high school students with significant intellectual and physical disabilities. The model incorporates classroom instruction, career exploration, and one-on-one job training in a variety of hospital settings. The student's desire for competitive employment is a key criterion for acceptance into the program. Project SEARCH considers successful outcome for program graduates to be year-round employment in an integrated workplace working at least 20 hours a week and earning minimum wage or higher.

After a 2008 visit to Cincinnati, a New Hampshire team came back committed to bringing the Project SEARCH model to the Granite State. The team collaborated with local hospitals, New Hampshire high schools, New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Developmental Services to make

this happen. In January 2009, with support from Gateways Community Services, a Lead Agency for the Granite State Employment Project, the state's first Project SEARCH class began at St. Joseph's Hospital in Nashua. The model has been replicated at hospitals in Portsmouth, Manchester, Concord, Littleton, and Keene.

At the local level Project SEARCH is implemented by community partners that include businesses, the participating hospital, school districts, New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation, community service providers, families, and the Social Security Administration. As mentioned earlier, each local Project SEARCH has a Business Advisory Council to provide ongoing support and guidance. Each program site also signs a license agreement with the Project SEARCH national site at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and reports data to them. The Bureau of Developmental Services is responsible for statewide coordination for Project SEARCH. Statewide oversight is jointly provided by New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Developmental Services. The two systems work together to make quality improvements that are consistent with best training practices and the Project SEARCH model.

## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 6 Project SEARCH sites have been established at community hospitals in New Hampshire
- ▶ 100 students have enrolled in Project SEARCH
- ▶ 94 students have graduated from Project SEARCH
- ▶ 70 Project SEARCH graduates are competitively employed
- ▶ Average hours per week for Project SEARCH graduates: 17 hours
- ▶ Average pay per hour for Project SEARCH graduates: \$8.86
- ▶ Employment rate for Project SEARCH graduates: 74%

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In July 2012, three New Hampshire sites were recognized at the Project SEARCH International Conference for their 2010-2011 Employment Placements:

- ▶ Catholic Medical Center, Manchester, 100% employment placements
- ▶ St. Joseph Hospital, Nashua, 80% employment placements
- ▶ Concord Hospital, Concord, 70% employment placements

## **Sodexo STRIDE Program**

As a result of positive experiences with Project SEARCH at St. Joseph's Hospital, Sodexo Foods approached LinkAbilities, an employment program at Gateways Community Services, to help them create a customized skills training program with Sodexo at Lowell General Hospital. In February 2007, LinkAbilities and Sodexo, in cooperation with Lowell General Hospital and the Plus Company, launched STRIDE (Sodexo Training and Recruitment for Individuals with Disabilities for Employment), a 20-week internship program offered twice a year to adults with disabilities from Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

STRIDE interns move through three six-week unpaid internship rotations, one intern per site, per rotation. At the end of their training each participant is awarded with a certificate and begins working with a job developer to find employment. STRIDE's goal is for 90% of its graduates to be competitively employed within 90 days of completing the program. Like Project SEARCH, the program has a Business Advisory Council comprised of STRIDE partners and local business leaders to help graduates connect with employment opportunities in their communities.

As of September 2012, 13 students have graduated from the STRIDE Program at Lowell General Hospital; all are competitively employed. Sodexo now has a second STRIDE Program, developed in partnership with Lakes Region Community Services and New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation, at Plymouth State University. The first class at the

Plymouth site graduated in December 2012; three of the four graduates were employed upon graduation.

## **Granite State Employment Project Outcomes**

- ▶ 2 Sodexo STRIDE Programs (Lowell General Hospital and Plymouth State University) have been established
- ▶ 13 individuals with disabilities graduated from the Sodexo STRIDE program at Lowell General Hospital
- ▶ Employment rate for Sodexo STRIDE Lowell graduates: 100%
- ▶ 4 individuals with disabilities graduated from Sodexo STRIDE at Plymouth State University
- ▶ Employment rate for Sodexo STRIDE Plymouth graduates: 75%

## **INCOME (Internship Career Opportunities, Mentoring, and Education)**

INCOME, a program developed by the PLUS Company, LinkAbilities, and the New Hampshire Association of Insurance Agents, provides customized training for individuals with disabilities interested in careers in office administration. The program, which began in February 2012, is offered twice per year and includes an 18-week course and a 15-week internship at a local business. As of September 2012 there have been six INCOME graduates; three are now competitively employed.

## **Granite State Employment Project Outcomes**

- ▶ INCOME Program established in Nashua to provide training in office skills
- ▶ 6 individuals have completed the INCOME Program
- ▶ 3 INCOME graduates are competitively employed
- ▶ Employment rate for INCOME graduates: 50%

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## ***START (Skills, Tasks, and Results Training) Hospitality Program***

START is a one-year classroom and internship program for students over 18 years of age with special needs. Using a curriculum developed by the American Hotel and Lodging Education Institute, the program provides students with real world knowledge and skills for a long-term career in the hospitality industry. The program is a collaborative effort by Great Bay Community College, Strafford Learning Center, and the New Hampshire Lodging and Restaurant Association.

### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ **START Hospitality Program established to provide training for Seacoast students**
- ▶ **36 students enrolled in the START program**
- ▶ **31 students completed 320 hour START internship rotations**
- ▶ **31 START students received a certificate from the American Hotel and Lodging Education Institute**
- ▶ **15 START graduates have obtained competitive employment**
- ▶ **Employment rate for START graduates – 48%**

## **Strategic Priority Area 2: Employment & Transition Services for Students**

During the planning period for the grant, a lack of quality secondary transition services and employment preparation for youth with disabilities were identified as critical issues that needed to be addressed. Transition refers to a facilitated person-centered planning process to help middle and high-school youth make a successful move from school to the adult world. Effective transition plans help the student articulate personal goals, identify the resources needed to meet these goals, and provide targeted services and supports. Through focus groups and interviews, stakeholders commented that in New Hampshire students with disabilities begin the transition process late in their high school years and that

the implementation of transition services among school personnel was inconsistent. The Granite State Employment Project undertook a variety of activities to improve transition services for youth.

## ***Statewide and Local Transition Communities of Practice***

The New Hampshire Transition Community of Practice is a statewide group bringing together stakeholders with expertise and experience in effective transition practices. Members are committed to improving the transition from high school to adulthood and making a difference in the lives of New Hampshire youth, particularly those with disabilities. The Granite State Employment Project worked with the New Hampshire Transition Community of Practice to support its annual Transition Summit and provided support to the regional Transition Communities of Practice. The regional groups included members from local school districts and community providers who came together to improve transition services and coordinate resources. The project also disseminated information about national best practices in transition supports and services.

### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ **240 people attended the annual statewide Transition Summit supported by the project**
- ▶ **4 regional Transition Communities of Practices received support from the project**

## ***Professional Development***

During the grant period, the project provided training and technical assistance to school transition coordinators and educators. Professional development efforts were directed at increasing educators' knowledge and skills in the following areas: the person-centered planning process, Measurable Individual Education Plans for transition age students, vocational assessments, job training, work-based learning opportunities, job coaching, health and wellness promotion, and options for post-secondary education for students with disabilities.

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## Transition Products

Several transition products featuring best practices in transition services were developed through the Granite State Employment Project. These included:

- ▶ **Habits of Work** – a training curriculum developed for youth to teach universal soft skills and workplace habits. It can be used as a stand-alone curriculum or in conjunction with extended learning opportunities.  
<http://habitsofwork.keenecommons.net/home>
- ▶ **Create Approved Work-based Learning Experiences** – a guide for educators and business partners to establish work-based and extended learning opportunities that are approved by the Department of Labor and the Department of Education. <http://transitions.keenecommons.net/print-materials>
- ▶ **Build Partnerships for Career Exploration: Using Job Shadows to Explore the World of Work** – a guide for setting up job shadowing opportunities for the purpose of career exploration and vocational assessment. <http://transitions.keenecommons.net/print-materials>
- ▶ **Extended Learning Opportunities** In partnership with Keene State College and Q.E.D. developed the [www.beyondclassroom.org](http://www.beyondclassroom.org) website to support educators in developing extended learning opportunities to give students real world experiences to learn skills.
- ▶ **On-Line Multi-Media Resource on the Requirements of an Individualized Education Plan(IEP)** – a multi-media training and resource tool designed to increase understanding about IEP transition requirements and indicator 13. It features video interviews with a leading national expert on IDEA transition requirements and Indicator 13, Dr. Ed O’Leary.

### Granite State Employment Project Outcomes

- ▶ 1,232 people from 47 states have viewed the Habits of Work Curriculum
- ▶ 10,300 visitors from every state in the nation have viewed the Ed O’Leary Videos

## RENEW – University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability

Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education, and Work (RENEW) is a structured school to career transition planning and individualized wrap around process for youth with emotional and behavioral challenges. With support from the Granite State Employment Project, RENEW faculty provided scholarships for staff from six community mental health centers to attend a three day RENEW Facilitator training. In addition, RENEW developed online training modules through the University of New Hampshire to provide ongoing training to professionals.

### Granite State Employment Project Outcomes

- ▶ 38 Community mental health center staff participated in RENEW training
- ▶ 12 community mental health center staff participated in RENEW Facilitator training
- ▶ 6 half-day technical assistance sessions were conducted with community mental health centers

## Web-based Transition Resources

The Transition and Career Resources website was launched by the Monadnock Center for Successful Transitions and Keene State College. The website serves as a clearinghouse of information on transition supports and services.

<http://transitions.keenecommons.net/home>.

### Granite State Employment Project Outcomes

- ▶ Transition and Career Resources website
- ▶ 18 videos were produced and disseminated on YouTube
- ▶ Habits of Work curriculum

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A **Customer Guide to Job Placement Services** was developed by Vocational Rehabilitation with support from the Granite State Employment Project. The guide provides a step-by-step description of Vocational Rehabilitation's job development and placement process for both supported and non-supported employment. The guide clearly lays out the specific responsibilities that the job developer and the Vocational Rehabilitation customer have for each step of the placement process. The guide also includes information about organizations that contract with Vocational Rehabilitation and profiles of job developers who work with Vocational Rehabilitation customers. While the guide is a tool that is available to all Vocational Rehabilitation customers, it is particularly helpful for young adults transitioning from school to adult services and their families.

## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ A Customer Guide to Job Placement Services developed by Vocational Rehabilitation

## **ACES (A Chance to Experience Success)**

Keene State College, Monadnock Center for Successful Transitions, and New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation collaborated on the development of ACES, a two-week residential summer program at Keene State College for high school students with learning disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Financial support for ACES is made available to students who qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation services. ACES students participate in classroom learning, stimulating discussion groups, on-site work experiences, dorm living, and outdoor recreation. ACES offers students the opportunity to explore career paths and develop strategies for living independently. As part of ACES, students complete a portfolio that can be used to help them in planning their future.

## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ ACES Program for high school students with learning disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- ▶ 35 students have completed the ACES Program

## **Strategic Priority Area 3: Enhancing Staff Training and Development Opportunities**

Prior to the Granite State Employment Project, New Hampshire had extremely limited training options for staff doing job development. In addition, the quality of employment supports and services for people with disabilities varied widely from region to region and program to program. To address these challenges, the project made a major investment in professional development for job developers and other employment specialists. The project significantly expanded training opportunities, created a professional development infrastructure, and through a number of venues provided leadership to develop shared professional practices that would result in better employment outcomes.

## **Community of Practice for Employment**

The project created a statewide Community of Practice on employment. The purpose of the group, which meets bimonthly, is to share resources, expertise, and work on issues of common concern. The Employment Community of Practice is looking at how to expand and improve interactions with the business community, offer quality professional development, and achieve excellence in employment services. Membership is broad with statewide representation from area agencies, mental health centers, Vocational Rehabilitation, and private employment providers. Many of the members of the Employment Community of Practice are also active in their regional workforce development coalitions.

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## **Regional Workforce Development Coalitions**

As part of the project's system change effort, workforce development coalitions were organized in eight regions of the state – Greater Concord, Lakes Region, Monadnock Region, Upper Valley, Greater Manchester, Seacoast, Greater Nashua, and the North Country. The purpose of the coalitions is to support quality job placement services, expand and improve vocational opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and serve as a resource to the businesses in their communities. Regional coalitions meet monthly to share information that will benefit both job seekers and employers. The coalitions address local issues and share ideas on how to find employment for individuals with complex needs. Coalition meetings include guest speakers from the business community, professional development presentations, and opportunities for networking. The majority of coalition members are job developers, employment specialists, and educators. Organizations represented on the coalitions include: area agencies, New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation, community mental health centers, New Hampshire Department of Employment Security, refugee resettlement programs, private vocational providers, school districts, and adult education agencies.

The coalitions work to develop a coordinated approach to educating employers on inclusive hiring practices using the WE ARE SUCCESS and the *Think Beyond the Label* marketing campaigns. The coalitions are a source of information and ideas on how to support quality job development and how to find employment for people with significant challenges. The coalitions follow the Community of Practice philosophy of no hierarchy, mutual engagement, and shared work. The regional coalitions are striving to provide an effective and sustainable approach for cultivating high professional standards that meet the needs of employers and job seekers with disabilities.

## **Granite State Employment Project Outcomes**

- ▶ Eight Regional Workforce Development Coalitions have been established
- ▶ All Coalitions have developed Professional Standards Agreements for their membership
- ▶ 6 Coalitions have worked with the I AM SUCCESS/WE ARE SUCCESS marketing campaign to develop promotional materials that feature local businesses
- ▶ Regional Workforce Coalitions have reached out to local Chambers of Commerce, Rotaries, and local businesses to promote hiring workers with disabilities
- ▶ Coalitions offer regular professional development opportunities for their membership
- ▶ Coalitions have helped with recruitment coordination for local, regional, and statewide employers

## **ACRE (Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators) Training**

The Granite State Employment Project contracted with the University of Massachusetts – Institute on Community Inclusion to help New Hampshire develop a state infrastructure to implement and sustain ACRE training. ACRE training is an intensive, nationally recognized, training model for professionals doing job development.

In New Hampshire, ACRE training includes four modules:

- ▶ Getting to Know the Job Seeker and Creating a Plan
- ▶ Making the Fit: Matching Employer Needs with Quality Job Matches
- ▶ Creating Training Supports and Strategies
- ▶ Work and Social Security Benefits.

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Participants completing the 40-hour training and all required fieldwork receive an ACRE Basic Employment Certificate, a nationally recognized professional qualification. ACRE curriculum is based on standards set by the national Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) and prepares professionals for the APSE national certification exam.

To ensure sustainability for this quality training, the project purchased a license from the University of Massachusetts-Institute on Community Inclusion to use and customize the ACRE curriculum and contracted with them to conduct a train-the-trainer session with four New Hampshire employment professionals. Having an in-state training capacity has proven cost effective and enabled the state to regularly offer ACRE training. Current ACRE trainers include employment specialists from New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation, two area agencies, and one provider agency.

ACRE training has played a crucial role in increasing the professionalism of job development in New Hampshire. Graduates of ACRE – whether in their first job out of college or veteran job developers – universally give the training extremely high marks and credit ACRE with helping them to achieve better outcomes for the people they serve.

## ***Association for Persons in Supported Employment***

The Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) is a national organization that promotes high quality, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. In 2012, APSE launched a Certified Employment Support Professional Examination as part of a national effort to improve effectiveness, advancement, and credibility of employment professionals. APSE worked with the Granite State Employment Project in piloting the exam. Job developers and employment professionals passing the exam receive a nationally recognized credential as a Certified Employment Support Professional.

### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ New Hampshire was the first state to sponsor the APSE exam
- ▶ 35 New Hampshire employment professionals received the nation's first Certified Employment Support Professionals credentials
- ▶ 51 New Hampshire employment services staff to date have passed the national APSE exam and are Certified Employment Support Professionals

### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ ACRE training is regularly offered to New Hampshire employment professionals
- ▶ 122 Professionals have completed ACRE training
- ▶ 35 ACRE trainees have taken and passed the national Certified Employment Support Professional exam
- ▶ New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Developmental Services have endorsed ACRE training as essential training for employment specialists

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### ***Supported Employment – Evidence Based Practices in Mental Health***

Since 2010, the Granite State Employment Project worked with the community mental health system to increase the state's capacity to provide vocational supports and services to individuals with severe mental illness and behavioral challenges. This effort included the promotion of evidence based supported employment practices developed by Dartmouth Medical School.

The project provided funding to community mental health providers to: 1) assist mental health agencies to integrate evidence based supported employment practices into their service delivery, 2) to offer intensive training and technical assistance on these practices, and 3) to develop infrastructures that support sustainability of evidence based supported employment services.

#### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ 75 individuals attended a statewide Evidence Based Supported Employment Summit
- ▶ 4 community mental health centers received grants to implement evidence based supported employment practices
- ▶ 6 community mental health centers received grants to increase their capacity to provide job development for individuals with severe mental illness

### ***Self-Employment Training***

The Granite State Employment Project piloted two initiatives to improve the state's capacity to support self-employment for individuals with developmental disabilities or mental illness. The project contracted with Griffin-Hammis Associates, a national leader in developing self-employment and microenterprise options for individuals with significant disabilities, to assist in this effort. Eight individuals interested in self-employment participated in Griffin-Hammis Entrepreneurial Success Project. The company also provided technical assistance to the project on strategies on how to sustain efforts to provide self-employment options for people with disabilities. As part of this sustainability, Opportunity Networks is providing training and technical support to individuals with disabilities pursuing self-employment in the Nashua region.

In the Monadnock region, the project worked with Micro-Credit and the Small Business Development Center to develop a curriculum for people with disabilities on how to create a business plan and connect with community supports.

New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation, Micro-Credit New Hampshire, and the Small Business Development Center partnered with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill –NH to educate families about supported employment and self-employment opportunities for people with mental illness.

#### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ 8 individuals with disabilities participated in the Entrepreneurial Success Project
- ▶ Opportunity Networks offers training and technical assistance to individuals with disabilities interested in pursuing self-employment

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### ***National Alliance for the Mentally Ill – New Hampshire***

In partnership with the Granite State Employment Project, NAMI-NH implemented several initiatives to promote employment for individuals with mental illness and to educate key stakeholder groups. In May 2012, they hosted a luncheon to educate New Hampshire legislators about the need for employment services and supports for individuals with mental illness. In addition, NAMI-NH developed an Employment Handbook and Resource Guide and a DVD directed at mental health consumers and their families.

#### ***Granite State Employment Project Outcomes***

- ▶ 50 people attended the NAMI-NH Employment Legislative Luncheon
- ▶ 500 households received the Employment Handbook and Resource Guide
- ▶ 6 Peer Support Centers developed and submitted Letters to the Editor and letters to legislators to support employment as part of recovery
- ▶ 2 peer support centers conducted educational events to promote employment opportunities

### ***Work Incentives and Public Benefit Programs***

The federal Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act called for the removal of work disincentives and the provision of a work incentive outreach program to educate individuals with disabilities about available programs that would allow them to return to work and still access needed healthcare coverage. Prior to the passage of the TWWIIA many Social Security and Medicaid beneficiaries were forced to forego employment and live in poverty in order to have their healthcare needs met.

In New Hampshire, Granite State Independent Living administered the Work Incentive Outreach program to help job seekers who were receiving Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income or Medicaid understand the financial implications of returning to work and educate them about available work incentives. Granite State Independent Living also provided training and technical assistance to New Hampshire organizations about employment supports, care coordination, work incentives, and other supports available to individuals with disabilities and their families.

#### **Three Tiered Work Incentive Capacity Building Model**

– For the Work Incentive Outreach program enacted under the TWWIIA, the highly technical and complex nature of public benefits presents a significant challenge; there are limited resources for training staff to help individuals and families understand how these benefits work. Yet, access to this information – in a format that is understandable – is critical if transition age youth and adults with disabilities are to participate in the workforce. Too often, people with disabilities are reluctant to take a job because they fear losing essential benefits.

To address this problem, New Hampshire stakeholders developed a three-tiered model to educate a broad range of audiences including families, individuals with disabilities, and staff about public benefits and work incentives. Tier 1 provided a basic training on all of the public benefit programs related to employment and earned income. Tier 2 provided advanced training and certification for Vocational Rehabilitation, area agency, and community mental health center staff whose responsibilities included communicating directly to individuals with disabilities and families about work incentives. Tier 3 training was for Granite State Independent Living staff providing technical assistance and individualized counseling to persons with more complex needs.

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## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 73 people completed Tier 1 training including: individuals with disabilities, family members, and staff from schools and provider agencies
- ▶ 14 staff completed Tier 2 training and were certified as work incentive specialists
- ▶ 333 service coordinators, employment staff, and family members attended half day orientations on public benefits
- ▶ 40 service coordinators, employment staff, and family members attended full day training sessions on public benefits

### **Work Incentive Capacity Building Pilot Program**

– Building off the Tier 2 training model, the Granite State Employment Project trained benefit coordinators in community mental health centers and area agencies to do local outreach and work incentives counseling in Derry, Keene, Manchester, Concord, and Laconia.

## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 14 staff, representing 7 agencies, completed Tier 2 Work Incentive training and certification
- ▶ 7 agencies provided targeted outreach and benefit analyses for their customers

**The Work Incentive Resource Center** – The Institute on Disability, in collaboration with Granite State Independent Living, created the Work Incentive Resource Center, a virtual clearinghouse for public benefit and work incentive information. An advisory committee that included persons with disabilities helped with the web-site design and made recommendations to improve accessibility. The Work Incentive Resource Center has four sections: 1) Myths and Facts, 2) Resources and Solutions, including information about income support programs, health insurance, and special savings programs, 3) Resources for Professionals, and 4) Contact Information. The site is updated regularly with the latest work incentive information. <http://www.nhwirc.org/>

## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 1,205 unique visitors to the Work Incentive Resource Center
- ▶ 2,045 total visits to the Work Incentive Resource Center

**Asset Building Coalitions** – Asset building is an anti-poverty strategy that helps low-income people move toward greater self-sufficiency by accumulating savings and purchasing long-term assets. As part of the Granite State Employment Project, six pilot projects were conducted to assist workers with disabilities to make the most of their financial resources. These pilots also provided training and information to professionals on how to assist clients to obtain free tax preparation, access special savings programs, and learn about financial education resources. Through the pilot projects, local asset building coalitions were created and community based provider agencies established partnerships to help individuals with disabilities more effectively connect with the services offered by their agencies.

The project worked with key stakeholders, including the New Hampshire Housing Authority, to develop and disseminate information about asset building.

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## *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 71 professionals and individuals with disabilities attended Regional Asset Building Summits
- ▶ 72 people with disabilities attended financial education workshops
- ▶ 4,780 direct mailings were disseminated to individuals with disabilities
- ▶ 215 people with disabilities attended community forums about Individual Development Accounts, tax credits, and financial literacy
- ▶ 6 people with disabilities enrolled in Individual Development Accounts
- ▶ 1,248 people with disabilities had their taxes prepared through the six asset building sites.
- ▶ 70 people with disabilities accessed individual money coaching services
- ▶ 103 staff from mental health centers and area agencies received training on financial literacy, IDAs, and tax credits targeted for their customers
- ▶ The New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority developed Find Financial Freedom, a web-based educational and outreach tool on financial self sufficiency <https://www.findfinancialfreedom.org/>

## **Strategic Priority Area 4: Employment Data Collection, Analysis, and Application**

A major objective of the Granite State Employment Project was improving the infrastructure for the state's employment supports and services. Project stakeholders recognized that developing an effective employment data system with the capacity to collect meaningful, reliable, and standardized data would be a critical to infrastructure improvement. To help design and implement the employment data system, the project formed statewide and regional planning teams with representation from Vocational Rehabilitation, community mental health centers, area agencies, private providers, and New Hampshire's college and university system.

Members of these teams had expertise in employment services, human resource management, secondary transition, information technology, research, and evaluation.

The teams identified current employment data systems and identified data points in these systems that were critical to program management and decision-making. Stakeholders agreed on universal data points that should be collected across systems: i.e. types of employment, wages per hour, hours per week worked. Teams also noted that different organizations – community mental health centers, area agencies, and Vocational Rehabilitation – had data collection needs that were unique and driven by the specific nature of their services or to meet state and federal reporting requirements.

The state team finalized the characteristics for the employment data system and put out a request for proposal to develop the system. A contract was awarded to a vendor that would work in partnership with the Granite State Employment Project to bring the system on line. The work moved forward with development of data points, clarification of user roles, and testing system functionality. The Employment Indicator Decision Support application was developed and tested with users from all participating systems and a vulnerability assessment was conducted to evaluate data security. Accompanying materials also were developed, including: a user training manual, draft policies and procedure manual, HIPAA and HITECH compliance reviews, and data sharing and security protocols.

In the course of developing the employment data system, the New Hampshire State Legislature, in response to the economic recession, made substantial cuts to the State's budget. Concerned that the State funds would not be available to sustain the data system in the long-term, the project was put on hold.

The Bureau of Developmental Services was able to utilize existing resources to implement an employment data system for developmental services. This system, coordinated by Community Support Network Inc., is currently being used to track employment outcome for all individuals in the developmental ser-

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vices system. Area agencies, employment providers, and the Bureau of Developmental Services report that access to consistent and reliable data has helped with decision-making about employment services at the individual, agency, and state levels. As an example, one area agency established performance measures for its sub-contractors and reviews employment data as part of the annual contracting process to determine how well the sub-contracting agencies are performing.

### *Granite State Employment Project Outcomes*

- ▶ 350 personnel are licensed to use the system
- ▶ 59 employment vendors, including the State's ten area agencies, are enrolled in the employment data system
- ▶ 100 developmental service staff members actively use the employment data system
- ▶ 1,273 persons served by developmental services (as of December 2012) work in community-based integrated settings
- ▶ \$7.83 is the average wage per hour for persons served by developmental services
- ▶ 9 hours is the average hours worked per week for persons served by developmental services

### **Strategic Priority Area 5: Enhancements of Policies, Rules and Funding Arrangements for Employment Services**

The Granite State Employment Project provided leadership to revise or enhance policies and procedures to better support employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Project partners focused on achieving coherence of employment policies, rules, reimbursement, and best practices.

- ▶ **Project Search** – In Spring 2012, the Bureau of Developmental Services and Vocational Rehabilitation established joint oversight of the Project SEARCH initiatives in New Hampshire. The Bureau of Developmental Services coordi-

nates with the national Project SEARCH site to respond to requests for technical assistance. These moves have helped to ensure that New Hampshire's programs are meeting the standards for the Project SEARCH model, are achieving sufficient outcomes, and utilizing public funding effectively.

- ▶ **Expanded Opportunities for Job Exploration and Training** – In 2011, the New Hampshire Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law, legislation amending Title XXIII Labor Chapter 279:22-aa, the law governing unpaid internships. The new law allows adults with disabilities to take advantage of time-limited, nonpaid work based activities (job shadowing, clinical placements, work experience, internships, service learning, mentoring, situational assessments, and training programs). The law also permits businesses to provide this nonpaid work experience without being in violation of the Department of Labor hour and wage laws. This legislation significantly expanded job exploration and training opportunities for adults with disabilities. It allows individuals with disabilities to gain experience, learn important workplace skills, and build a resume. The law allow gives employers the opportunity to learn about the capabilities of workers they might not otherwise have considered.
- ▶ **Supported Employment Quality Indicators** – The New Hampshire Developmental Services Quality Council adopted supported employment quality indicators consistent with those established by the Association for Persons in Supported Employment. These indicators are currently being used to refine employment data reporting and in the future will be used as a guide to establish performance benchmarks for the developmental services system.
- ▶ **Employment Position Statement** – The Developmental Services Employment Leadership Group developed an Employment Position Statement for New Hampshire's Regional Developmental

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Service System (area agencies, subcontract agencies, and the Bureau of Developmental Services). The position statement underscores the value of employment and calls for the regional system to provide the necessary services and supports to enable individuals with disabilities to obtain employment in integrated community-based jobs. All members of the Regional Developmental Services System have pledged to implement the goals outlined in the Employment Position Statement. To view the Developmental Services Employment Position Statement, please visit: <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bds/documents/employmentpositionstatement.pdf>

## V. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GRANITE STATE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

**Replication of a National Model Proved Effective –** Early in the project, a group of stakeholders including employment service providers, and state administrators, along with New Hampshire business and industry leaders, visited Project SEARCH’s original site at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. They asked critical questions and learned more about the technical assistance available from the national Project SEARCH organization. Having the opportunity to see first hand an exemplary program in operation convinced key stakeholders to bring the Project SEARCH model to New Hampshire. The success of the first Project SEARCH pilot at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Nashua led to the expansion of Project SEARCH to five other community hospitals.

**Take Time in the Beginning to Lay the Foundation for Success –** In piloting the first Project SEARCH site, the work done at the very beginning of the project was critical to the ultimate success of the initiative. Project implementation proceeds much more smoothly when there is a firm commitment from all partners and everyone is clear about what is needed for the project to succeed. Devoting the necessary time early on to plan the project and foster collaborative partnerships are investments that reap substantial long-term benefits.

**Ensure Quality Improvement Systems are in Place –** Granite State Employment Project leadership made the decision to develop additional Project SEARCH sites while grant funding was still available. In hindsight, not all of the necessary quality improvement systems were in place to adequately support sites as they moved from the planning stage to full implementation. The installation in 2011-2012 of quality improvement systems at the state level and assistance from the Project Search National Technical Assistance Center helped to address this issue. In addition, several other resources – training, coach-

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ing, technical assistance, and IT support – were made available to the new Project SEARCH sites. These efforts, along with technical assistance from the national Project SEARCH organization, helped these sites to put continuous quality improvement measures in place.

**Financing and Sustaining Support for Innovative Initiatives is Complex** – Most of the sector-based workforce models implemented during the grant period are funded through tuition fees. Individuals enrolling in these programs depend upon organizational funding to support their participation. Eligibility requirements differ from agency to agency and service system to service system. In addition, some individuals may be eligible for support from several systems. Identifying available funds and combining resources in order to support an individual's participation in a program is cumbersome and time consuming.

Experience with Project SEARCH illustrated the complexity of cobbling together financing. Funding available for students participating in the program varied from school district to school district. Even transition age youth who have adequate financial support from their school districts to fund their participation, may be on their area agency's waiting list for adult services. The uncertainty about whether funds for needed supports will be available after the student turns 21 is a challenge for those making decisions about candidates for the program. Will the investment in intensive training reap long-term benefits if the student is not able to access needed supports from the adult service system? To address this concern, the Bureau of Developmental Services is proposing a rule change that would make a commitment to funding employment supports for students who graduate with a job. Future funding decisions will need to insure that improvements made in the system infrastructure and employment outcomes are sustained.

**Shared Leadership, Planning, and Funding and are Key to Strong Partnerships** – From the beginning, the Granite State Employment Project promoted cross system leadership, collaborative project planning, and shared funding to support initiatives undertaken during the grant period. This approach is helping to change a culture where services operate in separate silos and typically have little connection with one another. The successful adoption of the Project SEARCH model in New Hampshire was the result of a strong collaborative effort by the Bureau of Developmental Services system, Vocational Rehabilitation, school districts, the business community, and local hospitals. Without this shared commitment of leadership, organizational expertise, and resources, Project SEARCH would never have gotten off the ground.

While initial collaboration were absolutely crucial to the success of the Granite State Employment Project, sustaining project initiatives will require a long-term commitment from key stakeholders. For example, the complexity of the Project SEARCH funding model suggests on-going support from the Bureau of Developmental Services is necessary to ensure Project SEARCH graduates have the resources they need from the adult service system. The Bureau is strongly committed to the program, and has made funding for Project SEARCH a priority. However, the continuing State budget crisis and expanding developmental services waiting list threaten the Bureau's ability to follow through on this commitment.

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**Termination of Federal Funding for Work Incentives Counseling Required State Solutions** The Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999 made federal resources for Work Incentives Counseling available until June 30, 2012. During the Granite State Employment Project, several additions to the State's work incentive infrastructure were made. These included, but were not limited to, the development of the Work Incentives Resource Center and extensive training for provider staff and families on public benefits and work incentives. However, absent a stable funding source, sustaining a cadre of work incentives specialists and keeping their training current presents a significant challenge. As New Hampshire moves forward with new initiatives, service providers and advocates will need to provide work incentives counseling to ensure that individuals with disabilities are able to take advantage of work opportunities and still have needed health care coverage.

**Expect the Unexpected and Learn to Adapt to a Changing Environment** – In developing new initiatives and introducing innovative approaches to employment services, the Granite State Employment Project planned for sustainability. There were, however, unanticipated events outside of the project's control that required leaders to rethink plans and make adjustments. For example, efforts to develop a multi-agency employment data system were well underway when major State budget cuts and unanticipated expenses kept the project from putting the system on line. This set back was extremely disappointing to stakeholders who had put so much effort and time into this work. Project partners, however, stepped back readjusted their expectations and leveraged other resources to operationalize an employment data system for the developmental services system.

## VI. SUSTAINABILITY OF GRANITE STATE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT EFFORTS

The purpose of the Granite State Employment Project was to initiate needed systems change, including designing a vocational services infrastructure that would provide quality job development and placement services and significantly expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Although a multi-year project, it will be many more years before we know whether the system change efforts undertaken by the Granite State Employment Project are successful in the long run.

From the onset, the project was committed to planning for sustainability; strategies to accomplish this included:

- ▶ Integrating new initiatives into the current service infrastructure and using existing resources to support these initiatives. New Hampshire was very cautious not to create new positions that needed to be funded after the grant ended
- ▶ Looking for opportunities to maximize existing resources and improve efficiencies
- ▶ Developing sustainability plans for successful initiatives
- ▶ Collaborating with partner agencies to braid and blend funding to support successful projects

During the grant period, 2007-2012, a number of events unfolded that presented significant challenges to sustaining the work of the Granite State Employment Project.

- ▶ New Hampshire, like the rest of the nation, experienced a severe economic recession.
- ▶ There were significant cuts in the State Budget, particularly for the State's Department of Health and Human Services. New Hampshire's Bureau of Behavioral Health Services and community mental health care system were especially hard hit. At the same time State agencies were coping with budget reductions, they were also experiencing a substantial increase in the demand for their services.

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- ▶ In 2012, the New Hampshire Legislature passed a bill to put the State's Medicaid services under a managed care model which created some uncertainty regarding how employment services might be supported and sustained under the managed care arrangement.

Project stakeholders fully appreciated the serious nature of these challenges. However, in spite of shrinking resources and changes to the State's service infrastructure, they have remained committed to doing whatever it takes to sustain employment initiatives that have proven to be the most beneficial for New Hampshire's residents with disabilities. Stakeholders are working to ensure the continuation of the following initiatives that were developed through the Granite State Employment Project.

### 1. Outreach and Partnership with Employers

- ▶ Annual New Hampshire Employment Leadership Awards
- ▶ Sector-based Training
- ▶ IAM SUCCESS/WE ARE SUCCESS Marketing Campaign

### 2. Employment and Transition Services for Students

- ▶ New Hampshire Transition Community of Practice
- ▶ Annual Transition Summit (statewide conference focused on effective transition practices)
- ▶ Professional Development on Best Practices for Transition Services
- ▶ ACES (Residential summer program at Keene State College for students with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

### 3. Enhancing Staff Training and Development Opportunities

- ▶ Regional Workforce Development Coalitions
- ▶ New Hampshire Employment Community of Practice
- ▶ ACRE Training
- ▶ APSE National Certification Exam
- ▶ Brain Injury Employment Curriculum
- ▶ Evidence Based Supported Employment
- ▶ Public Benefits and Work Incentives Training
- ▶ Work Incentives Resource Center

### 4. Employment and Data Collection, Analysis and Application

The Developmental Services Employment Data System is currently sustainable. However, it must remain a part of future discussions regarding expectations for future system changes initiated by the Bureau of Developmental Services and the Department of Health and Human Services.

To continue refining and improving the delivery of employment services, it is important for cross system partners (the State's Bureaus of Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Services, and Behavioral Health and the Department of Education) to share best practices and review employment data at least semiannually. This can be accomplished by:

- ▶ Establishing a clear and specific memorandum of understanding between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education
- ▶ Including specific contract language that clearly outlines expectations regarding employment outcomes and access to services
- ▶ Sustaining the progress that has been made for New Hampshire to become an Employment First State.

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### 5. *Enhancement of Policies, Rules, and Funding Arrangements for Employment Services*

- ▶ Advocates and agencies must remain diligent in their support of the Medicaid Buy-in program.
- ▶ Advocates and agencies must continue to work towards an internal policy solution or legislation to protect assets for individuals who are turning 65. Currently, when individuals protected through the Medicaid-Buy In program turn 65 they are no longer eligible for the program. If they are to continue receiving Medicaid Services, their assets are counted and frequently lost.
- ▶ Innovative solutions are needed to support students transitioning from school to adulthood. Employment must be recognized as a priority outcome with adequate resources to support quality job training and placement options for youth with disabilities. This effort would be included under New Hampshire's move to become an Employment First State.
- ▶ We must continue to work with all stakeholders to develop alternative funding strategies that support positive employment outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities.

### VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

- ▶ **Propose to Governor Hassan that a Governor's Employment Task Force be established.** An officially sanctioned Governor's Task Force would help to sustain New Hampshire's momentum to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. A New Hampshire Employment Task Force also would complement current efforts by the National Governor's Association to promote Employment First initiatives.
- ▶ **Maintain a strong commitment to high quality staff training and coaching for employment professionals.**
- ▶ **Improve New Hampshire's capacity to support sector-based programs.** The Granite State Employment Project put in place a variety of effective sector-based training and employment programs. The State's commitment to this effort should continue. New Hampshire should have the capacity to refine and improve existing programs and to incubate new programs in response to industry demand. As New Hampshire looks to implement system improvement initiatives, funding models for this effort will need to be explored.
- ▶ **Expand availability of training programs within community colleges for individuals with disabilities who would not otherwise qualify for credited courses.**
- ▶ **Establish opportunities within new system improvement initiatives to make work incentives counseling available to help individuals maximize their earning potential and maintain their access to needed healthcare.**
- ▶ **Continue to foster evidence-based best practices for transition age youth.** Work with the Department of Education, school districts, local middle and high schools, and New Hampshire's post-secondary institutions to implement practices that lead to high school graduation, post-secondary education and training, and meaningful employment.

# GRANITE STATE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

## Medicaid Infrastructure Grant for Comprehensive Employment Opportunities “Working to Improve Employment for People with Disabilities”

The mission of the Granite State Employment Project is to improve the employment for people with disabilities in New Hampshire by establishing two pilot demonstration models that will create leadership, collaboration with the community, outreach to employers, businesses, and school systems, build capacity for training and staff development, and support the information technology and employment database needs of the projects.

### Overall Project Objectives – To develop an employment system that:

- Meets the employment needs and desires of the persons with disabilities;
- Increases individual’s income, independence, and personal responsibility;
- Provides services in a cost effective way; and
- Builds community

### About the MIG CEO

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) awarded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has been awarded to approximately 30 states across the country and is the source of funding for NH Granite State Employment Project. This 11-year initiative, which New Hampshire began in 2001, is to create the infrastructure needed to help support competitive employment opportunities for people with disabilities by addressing barriers to employment, access to health care services, and integrate the linkages between Medicaid and other employment-related service agencies that will lead to statewide comprehensive employment opportunities (CEO) systems changes.

### Granite State Employment Project Organizational Structure

- MIG Leadership Council:
- Governor’s Task Force for Employment & Economic Opportunities.
- MIG State Project Team:
  - Members consist of four agencies: NH Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, NH Employment Security, NH Department of Education, DHHS/Bureau of Behavioral Health, and Bureau of Developmental Services.
- MIG State Steering Committee:
  - Membership includes individuals and families with disabilities, local and state organizations, advocacy groups, and universities.
- If you are interested in joining the State Steering Committee, contact Denise Sleeper at (603) 271-5161 or (800) 852-3345 Ext. 5161 or [denise.sleeper@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:denise.sleeper@dhhs.state.nh.us)

