



Blueprint for Success 2.0: Moving Forward Together

**A Road Map to Expand
Employment Opportunities
and Meaningful Community
Engagement**



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Blueprint for Success 2.0: Moving Forward Together

A Road Map to Expand Employment Opportunities and Meaningful Community Engagement

The mission of the Department of Developmental Services is to create, in partnership with others, innovative and genuine opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and Autism to participate fully and meaningfully in and to contribute to their communities as valued members.

Introduction

We have developed this Blueprint 2.0 to promote the continued evolution of employment and community-based day services and supports provided by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Our goal is to increase and enhance employment and/or meaningful engagement opportunities for individuals served by DDS to be productive and contributing members of their communities.

We convened a collaborative work group in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the work group was to collectively identify the impact, including opportunities, lessons learned, and implications for future service delivery. The membership of the work group included representatives from DDS, the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers (ADDP), The Arc of Massachusetts, employment and day service providers, and family members ([see Appendix for full list](#)).

This roadmap provides a path forward to “re-set” following the pandemic and build on the momentum of the Employment First initiatives and the changes and outcomes that occurred as a result of the 2013–2018 [Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in Massachusetts](#). These systems change initiatives are predicated on the belief that having a job has a positive impact on individuals’ quality of life, including increased self-confidence, sense of pride, and personal fulfillment; improved economic well-being; more opportunities to develop social relationships and friendships; and being perceived by others in a more positive light.

Beginning in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created major disruption in all aspects of life and resulted in the discontinuation of in-person day and employment services for an extended period of time. To inform this planning process and guide future service directions, we began a comprehensive approach to seek input from key stakeholder groups about their experiences with employment and day services during this time, and to better understand from different perspectives what they identify as important considerations moving forward.

In the winter and spring of 2021, we held virtual forums with Supported Employment Providers, Community-Based Day Support Providers, DDS Service Coordinators, and individuals who receive services in partnership with Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS). We gathered input from family members through an online survey that received 742 responses, along with several virtual forums and individual interviews specifically focused on reaching family members from diverse communities. A summary of the overarching findings and themes can be found on the [Employment First Massachusetts website](#).

It is important to acknowledge the resilience of individuals and families and the resourcefulness and creativity providers demonstrated during this time, while also recognizing the emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other tragic events leading to social unrest. Recognizing the emotional impact of these events will require different supportive approaches to address the anxiety and uncertainty people may experience as they return to services. Technology opened doors, individuals learned new skills, and for many, virtual services were a “life-line” to maintain connections with peers and staff and provide a sense of purpose. However, we recognize this was not true for all individuals. For some, virtual services may not have been an effective modality, or there may have been other factors, such as lack of access to technology, the internet, and/or assistance to use virtual platforms.

Some common themes emerged about what is important and beneficial in how we provide employment and day supports, including:

- services being community-based with engagement in a variety of experiences
- services based on individuals' interests and goals
- services provided in small groups
- assistance to obtain paid employment
- opportunities to develop relationships and friendships
- flexibility in choices, structure, and predictable schedules

Despite the challenges posed during the past two years, there are many opportunities to build on as we support individuals moving forward. The benefits of the role of technology have become evident. These benefits present opportunities to increase access to and integration of supportive technology to support skill development, independence, community participation, and success in the workplace. There are opportunities to support individuals more flexibly in services and strategies to use community settings more effectively and inclusively. Businesses have a great need and demand for workers, which provides opportunities for increased access to employment for individuals with disabilities.

While there continue to be challenges related to COVID-19 and workforce shortages, there is a commitment to enhance the system of supports that is person-centered, promotes innovation, and strives to address structural limitations and barriers to facilitate opportunities for individuals to have valued roles in employment and the community. Optimizing natural supports, supportive technology, and resources and opportunities available to all people is central to enabling individuals to build relationships and belong to their communities.

The Foundation

Blueprint for Success (2013–2018)

In 2010, the Department adopted an [*Employment First Policy*](#) which established that integrated, individual employment should be the preferred service option and outcome for working-age adults served by DDS. To support fuller implementation of this policy, in 2013, the Department, in collaboration with service providers and other stakeholders, issued the [*Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in Massachusetts*](#). Additional catalysts for this plan involved federal policy changes and legal actions that required movement away from reliance on segregated work settings. The overall goal and intent of this 5-year plan was to transform the existing work and day services to promote increased access to quality supports that would lead to integrated employment outcomes as well as redesign community-based day support (CBDS) services to serve as the foundation and pathway to employment and other avenues for skill development and meaningful community engagement.

In 2016, the Department, in partnership with employment providers, individuals, and families, phased out the use of sheltered workshop services for approximately 2,600 individuals (1,250 who were attending sheltered workshops full time and about 1,350 who attended part time who were also participating in individual or group supported employment). An investment of new funding resources over three years, and a comprehensive array of training, technical assistance, organizational consultation, and capacity development activities implemented since 2013, provided increased integrated employment outcomes at businesses in the community and supported the redesign and evolution of CBDS services. Individuals were supported to become employed through individual and/or group supported employment services, while other individuals transitioned to CBDS, which offered increased community-based career exploration and related experiences along with other meaningful ways to be productively engaged in inclusive enriching activities. While much progress has been made in transforming employment and day services, there is more work to be done to enhance and strengthen services to facilitate access, opportunities, and positive outcomes that are responsive to the diversity of adults supported by DDS and are in alignment with emerging policy and funding changes at the federal and state levels.

Values and Guiding Principles

Person-centered planning is the cornerstone of developing individualized supports based on the person's vision of what defines a good life that includes their interests, preferences, and how they want to be supported. Keeping the individual's voice at the center of planning helps identify the opportunities an individual is seeking to create a "meaningful week" of experiences and activities that support their identified vision, goals, and preferences. It can foster more expansive discussion and holistic thinking about options and supports available to all people in the community beyond funded services, which can shift the focus away from reliance on traditional 9am to 3pm program schedules that may lead to more flexibility in service options and schedules.

The design and delivery of employment and day services are guided by the following values:

- **Fostering valued roles** for all individuals as contributing members of their community
- Belief that **all individuals have gifts and talents** to be cultivated
- Informed choice, which includes access to information, education, and support about options and possibilities
- Promoting **self-determination**, which involves fostering skills and opportunities for individuals to exercise initiative, self-advocacy, and decision-making about future directions for their life
- **Dignity of risk**, which supports taking chances and learning from experiences
- Facilitating **friendships and relationships** among people with and without disabilities
- **Flexibility** in how service options are designed and provided to be responsive to individual needs and preferences

As a service system, DDS is committed to:

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**, which encompasses access to and delivery of responsive services based on culture, race, language, gender, ability, and sexual orientation, and a culture of mutual respect for individuals, their families, and staff providing services
- **Staff Training/Professional Development** to support innovation and high-quality services and recognize the importance and valued role of staff providing direct services
- **Continuous Quality Improvement**, which uses systematic approaches to assess the quality and effectiveness of services and outcomes to address gaps and needs and promote best practices and innovation

The provision of employment and day services is also informed by and supported by other DDS initiatives, including:

- **Supportive Technology**, which involves access to and integration of technology resources that can open doors and expand opportunities for skill development and independence.
- **Integration of [Charting the LifeCourse](#)**, a framework with resources that empower individuals with their families and supporters to describe their vision for a "good life." It encourages holistic thinking about the supports available to all people that can complement funded services, such as personal relationships/networks, community resources, and technology.
- **Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS)**, a broad range of strategies to help individuals improve their social and functional skills while preventing problematic behaviors. PBS is intended to transform how services are provided through incorporating person-centered practices, gentle teaching approaches, and an intentional focus on changing the physical and/or social environment that triggers difficult behaviors to prevent them from occurring.

State and Federal Context: Relationship to Services

The context of state and federal policies and regulations provides an important and essential framework for the planning, design, and delivery of services to ensure alignment and compliance. Alignment with fiscal resources, rate setting, service expectations and requirements, individualized planning approaches, and quality assurance (licensing and certification) is necessary to develop a coordinated and cohesive system of supports.

Following are some of the major areas that influence and impact the design and delivery of employment and day services:

- **Standard rates of payment** for health and human services, including supported employment and CBDS services are established as required by Chapter 257. These are determined by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) in partnership with the purchasing departments and are reviewed every two years. (include link)
- Supported employment and CBDS are **waiver services** available through the **Department's Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waiver Programs**, administered by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). The state receives federal financial participation for individuals enrolled in Waiver services, an important source of revenue for DDS adult services. Waiver services have specific service limits on frequency and duration and must also be provided in accordance with quality assurance and other standards set forth in the Waiver Programs by CMS.
- In March 2014, CMS issued regulations for HCBS containing **criteria for community-based settings** where services may be delivered under the HCBS Waiver Program. The intent of the Community Settings Rule is to assure that individuals receiving long-term services and supports through HCBS programs have full access to the benefits of community living and the opportunity to receive services in integrated settings. Waiver services need to be compliant with the community settings requirements by the established deadline of March 17, 2023. Within this framework, specific standards for supported employment and CBDS services include:
 - » Activities are individualized, based in the community, and are not specific to disability, providing individuals with opportunities to engage in community life
 - » Activities optimize autonomy and independence in making life choices, including choices regarding services and supports and who provides them
 - » Individuals are treated with privacy, dignity, and respect in all settings
 - » Individuals are supported to develop natural supports and relationships
 - » Setting(s) are integrated in the community and are physically accessible
- **[The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#)** passed in 2014 and included reforms intended to “improve services to individuals with disabilities by increasing access to high quality workforce services to prepare them for competitive integrated employment.” WIOA included supported employment and customized employment in its definition of competitive integrated employment. These definitions are listed in the **[Appendix](#)**. The passage of WIOA also placed new limits on the payment of subminimum wages under Section 511 (Effective July 22, 2016). The use of **subminimum wage** is limited to ensure that individuals with disabilities, especially students and youth, have opportunities for meaningful experiences to support their potential to be successful in competitive integrated employment.

Current Employment and Community-Based Day Services: Identified Areas for Service Enhancement

The following section provides an overview of the current DDS funded supported employment and CBDS services, key features, and areas identified for future service development and enhancement. Service planning is intended to be driven by what constitutes a meaningful week for individuals based on their person-centered plan. There is flexibility in how employment and day services can be provided through part-time schedules, or individuals splitting their time between services, such as working part time and participating in CBDS.

This roadmap is primarily focused on the services delivered by provider agencies qualified and funded by DDS. The data here provide a snapshot and baseline of current numbers of individuals engaged in these services:

- Currently there are over 120 providers qualified to deliver these services statewide

- There is a total of about 10,300 individuals enrolled in one or more of these services:

Individual Supported Employment: Approximately 4,000*
Group Supported Employment: Approximately 3,000*
Community-Based Day Supports: Approximately 7,550*

**Note: these numbers represent a duplicated count of individuals; individuals may participate in more than one service and are counted in each service they participate in.*

Individuals have the option to participate in more than one service during the week based on their goals, and approximately 40–45% of individuals split their time between individual or group supported employment and CBDS services.

Additionally, for individuals and families looking for more flexibility and control over creating more individualized experiences and supports, DDS offers the option for self-direction of services through two different approaches: 1) the Participant-Directed Program (PDP) or 2) Agency with Choice (AWC). You can find more information at the [DDS Self-Direction website](#).

Individuals may also combine working part time and participating in employment and/or CBDS services with other support services funded by DDS, such as Adult Companion, Individualized Home Supports, or others, based on their needs and funding availability, to have flexibility in creating a meaningful week.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Individual Supported Employment (ISE) encompasses an array of services designed to assist individuals to obtain and maintain long-term competitive integrated employment and build careers. Employment can occur in a variety of business settings and be tailored to meet the interests and skills of individuals with an emphasis on work environments that offer opportunities for interaction with co-workers, customers, supervisors, and people without disabilities.

Key Features:

- **Person-centered career planning** to identify career interests and preferences for work environments, assess skills and support needs, identify transportation options, and provide guidance on impacts of employment and income to public benefits
- **Assistance to obtain a job** through identifying career opportunities that are tailored to the individual's stated interests and goals, developing ongoing relationships with the business community, and assisting individuals to develop opportunities through their own personal networks
- **Initial and ongoing employment supports** that encompasses training and systematic instruction on the job to complement training resources offered by the employer, job coaching support, guidance to employers and co-workers, developing natural supports in the workplace, fading job coaching, and identifying opportunities and assistance to use supportive/assistive technology on the job.

Strategic Focus Areas for Service Enhancement & Innovation:

1. Increase access to and expertise in use of **supportive technology** by both individuals receiving services and staff providing supports to help individuals develop skills and independence on the job. This can encompass a variety of low-tech options anyone may use, such as alarms, reminders, and apps as well as more specialized technology tools.
2. Integrate **virtual service delivery approaches** through use of technology and other remote communication approaches to provide job coaching and other related employment services that complement in-person services. This is based on the individual's needs, preferences, and goals determined during the person-centered planning process and reviewed by the Service Coordinator/Area Office. Develop guidance about virtual service delivery to ensure quality of services and to ensure approaches are responsive to the support needs of individuals and employers.

3. Build greater capacity with providers and businesses to develop **customized employment opportunities** through enhanced person-centered discovery approaches and the tailoring of job responsibilities with businesses that meets their needs, with a specific emphasis on expanding opportunities for individuals who face more challenges to become employed, such as people with more complex support needs.
4. Increase and streamline access to employment for **individuals transitioning from school to adult life** through partnerships with local school systems and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.
5. Increase engagement and partner with the **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to work collaboratively in supporting mutually eligible individuals** to promote access to job skills training programs and other employment services leading to competitive integrated employment.
6. **Expand and streamline movement to individual employment from CBDS services** for those individuals interested in pursuing employment based on the experiences and opportunities offered that have provided them with a pathway to employment.
7. Develop capacity and expertise with providers to increase **supported entrepreneurial/self-employment opportunities** for individuals for whom this is a goal.
8. Continue developing and strengthening business relationships to expand the array and diversity of employment opportunities available to individuals supported by DDS. It is an optimal time to leverage the need for workers that many businesses are experiencing.

GROUP SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Group Supported Employment (GSE) provides paid employment for a small number of individuals (typically 2-6) working at a job in the community with supervision and support from a job coach from a provider agency. This may include job sites within a business, such as retail or manufacturing; mobile work crews, such as cleaning or landscaping services; or a business/social enterprise operated by a provider organization, such as a coffee shop or a mailing service. Emphasis is on work in integrated settings where individuals have regular interaction and contact with co-workers, company supervisors, customers, and people without disabilities.

GSE gives individuals the chance to explore career interests and different types of work and work settings. GSE also gives people the chance to develop work skills, positive work habits, interpersonal skills, endurance, and independence. For many individuals, GSE should be a *transitional service* that will facilitate movement to ISE. However, for some individuals, GSE may be a longer-term service option based on their high level of need for consistent support, structure, and supervision to be successful on a job. There should be an ongoing focus in evaluating an individual's progress to determine their capability to transition to competitive integrated employment.

Key Features:

- Services encompass **person-centered career planning** to identify employment interests and goals, assess skills and support needs, provide job coaching to promote skill building and soft skill development, build natural supports, foster positive social interactions and work relationships, and access transportation to and from group work sites.
- DDS supports the goal of all individuals being paid the applicable **minimum wage or comparable wage as others doing similar jobs**. When an employee is subject to both the state and federal minimum wage laws, the individual is entitled to the higher of the two minimum wages. In situations when provider agencies hold a Department of Labor certificate under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act that permits them to offer wages at a rate that is lower than the minimum wage based on a worker's productivity, they still must adhere to the rules and standards set forth in applicable law and regulation, including WIOA, and work toward the federal deadlines as stated in the next section.
- **Inclusion in the workplace** should be maximized by providing opportunities for individuals to have experiences that are similar to other employees in the business, and that allow for meaningful interaction with other non-disabled employees and/or customers.

Strategic Focus Areas for Service Enhancement & Innovation:

1. Beginning April 1, 2023 any worker entering GSE **will be paid minimum wage or higher**; use of sub-minimum wage payments in current sites will be phased out by October 1, 2024. This direction is consistent with national policy directions, legislation passed in other states, and the positive trends we have experienced here in Massachusetts.
2. Identify and promote **effective and successful partnerships with businesses and GSE service models that provide quality job experiences and greater opportunities for inclusion**. These approaches may also allow for more flexible and efficient use of job coaching staff while meeting the support needs of individual workers. Examples include dispersed group work settings that may occur at college campuses, hospitals, or big box stores.
3. **Support the development and expansion of “on-the job” skills training programs in partnership with businesses** that provide both valuable work experience for individual workers and support the development of a “pipeline” of workers for businesses in specific sectors with a high demand for employees. Some positive examples include partnerships with CVS, T.J. Maxx, and Sodexo.
4. **Create increased movement for individuals from GSE to ISE** through identifying and promoting best practices, staff training and development, and collaboration between providers, businesses, and DDS Area Offices.
5. **Integrate use of supportive technology** that may provide effective resources and tools for individuals to develop skills and greater independence on the job. Also, explore the use of technology for job coaches to deliver supports virtually in certain situations, such as at large work sites or in dispersed settings like a college campus, which may allow for more effective use of staff resources while promoting development of natural supports and independence.
6. **Update DDS Guidelines for Providers on Social Enterprises/Agency Run Businesses (2018)** to ensure equitable and inclusive work environments that support individual choice and consistent employee practices related to hiring, wages, and benefits.
7. Build capacity and resources to foster **access and support for individuals with more complex support needs** to successfully participate in GSE, including individuals with behavioral challenges, etc.

COMMUNITY-BASED DAY SUPPORTS

Community-Based Day Supports (CBDS) are designed to provide meaningful day experiences through offering an array of skill building, enrichment, and inclusive opportunities in a variety of integrated community settings based on individual preferences and needs as identified in their person-centered Individual Support Plan. Activities should be planful and should promote the full integration and inclusion of individuals with disabilities through positive community contributions and relationship development.

CBDS can include employment related and non-employment related activities, including volunteering, job exploration, civic groups and participation, personal enrichment (e.g., art, music), health and wellness, and skill development opportunities in areas such as money management, transportation, self-advocacy, soft skills, and job-seeking. For people of working age, the activities can serve as foundational experiences in the discovery of interests and the development of skills that support them on a pathway to employment, such as through volunteer work, community service, or internships.

CBDS services are intended for:

- Individuals of working age who may be on a path to employment
- Individuals who need a structured program to develop skills and behaviors necessary to create a pathway to employment
- Individuals who are employed part time and need a structured and supervised supplemental program during the day when they are not working
- Individuals of retirement age who need and want to participate in a structured and supervised program of services in a group setting

These services have been continually evolving following the phase-out of sheltered workshop services in 2016. The intent is to support individuals to be in the community most of time they are receiving supports, maximizing typical community activities and resources. This is in alignment with the CMS Community Settings Rule scheduled to go into effect in March 2023.

Key Features

- A **flexible support service** customized to individual needs, not a program that individuals are fit into. Experiences should be purposeful with services based on thoughtful person-centered planning approaches.
- **Integration and inclusion** should be maximized by using generic, natural, non-disability-specific community resources. This involves integration of both physical sites and activities for individuals to be **full participants** in community life, and to foster the development of relationships and friendships.
- Services provided in small groups in locations that are easily accessible by transportation, and near to businesses, community organizations, and activities.
- **A pathway to employment** is a core component for individuals of working age with activities designed to allow individuals to explore and discover interests, build and refine skills, and develop connections that will lead to employment.
- Development of robust approaches to engage in community mapping and build **connections and relationships with community organizations**.

Strategic Focus Areas for Service Enhancement & Innovation

1. Promote and support expansion of CBDS program models and service delivery approaches that support smaller groups and are more community-based through training, consultation, and sharing of best practices. These approaches will enable individuals to spend most of their time meaningfully participating in a diverse array of typical community activities and experiences and will support compliance/adherence with the CMS Community Settings Rule. To be successful, there is a need for a cultural shift in the role of direct support staff who will act as community facilitators.
 - » Approaches include: CBDS “Without Walls”, a service delivery approach that provides services exclusively in the community for small groups of individuals and doesn’t use a licensed program center as a base, or small satellites or program hubs/storefronts located in community centers accessible to transportation and a variety of community resources, businesses, and activities.
2. Development of a **Community Connector/Resource Development role** to establish relationships and expand partnerships and opportunities with community organizations in support of greater community participation.
 - » Resources were added to the CBDS rate model and structure in January 2022 to support this Community Connector role as well as to address costs for community activities, transportation, and technology.
 - » Develop organizational capacity and staff expertise to use community mapping as a tool to identify and build partnerships with a wider array of community organizations and resources.
3. Strengthen focus on CBDS as a pathway to employment for people of working age through the development of intentional and robust approaches that provide purposeful and hands-on experiences for discovery, exploration of interests, and development of skills and work behaviors through volunteer work, community service projects, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities. This involves communicating high expectations and adopting a pro-employment lens while also meeting individuals where they are in their employment development/journey.
 - » Support more seamless movement into job development and employment supports from CBDS by capitalizing on work-based experiences and connections made with businesses and community organizations.
4. Promote and support approaches and promising practices that foster individualized and person-driven services based on interests, goals, preferences, and support needs of individuals that will lead to improved outcomes and increased satisfaction with services.
 - » Provide information, training, and support on Charting the LifeCourse framework and tools designed to empower individuals to create their vision of what a good job and good life means to them.
 - » Identify and share effective programmatic practices in building calendars and schedules that create an array of opportunities and foster choice in activities.

5. Integrate use of technology in CBDS service delivery at both the individual and programmatic level.
 - » Provide teaching and support to individuals to develop skills and proficiency to use different types of technology as an integral component of services.
 - » Incorporate use of technology into in-person services and programming to expand access and exposure to different learning resources. For example, using video-based career planning platforms such as Virtual Job Shadow.
 - » Increase access to and use of supportive technology for individuals to facilitate their ability to engage in different activities, develop skills, and increase their independence.

MOVING FORWARD

The overarching goals of this Blueprint 2.0 are to:

- Phase out use of sub-minimum wage payments in any DDS funded employment setting; initially ending the use of subminimum wage for anyone entering a DDS funded employment service effective April 1, 2023 and ending the use of subminimum wage in any DDS funded employment services by October 1, 2024
- Increase the percentage of funding spent on employment services
- Increase the number of individuals successfully employed at businesses in the community and track other quality measures, such as increases in hours worked and/or wages earned
- Increase the number of individuals who have access to and opportunities for individual or group employment, with an emphasis on individuals with higher support needs who may face more barriers
- Increase the number of individuals who move from CBDS to employment
- Increase the number of young adults who transition directly from school into competitive integrated employment
- Increase the range of opportunities and amount of time individuals are meaningfully participating in valued roles in the community

Specific metrics and benchmarks will be established as the implementation phase for this Blueprint begins.

STRENGTHS/SUCCESSSES TO BUILD UPON

- Successful experiences of individuals with disabilities employed in a diverse array of jobs and businesses that have demonstrated work in the community is possible
- Large and growing number of businesses who recognize the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to meet their employment needs and the value of diversifying their workforce to be reflective of the communities and customers they serve
- Large and vibrant network of employment and day providers with strong community ties and business relationships who have effectively and successfully assisted many individuals with ID and Autism to enter the workforce and be productively engaged in their communities
- Voices and advocacy of individuals about their desire to be employed and to be included in the workplace like all other employees
- Emerging role technology can play in expanding opportunities through opening doors for individuals and how supports can be provided
- Strong spirit of partnership and collaboration among all stakeholders including DDS, the provider community, individuals with ID and Autism, and families
- Commitment and resources from DDS over the past 8 years with the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston to build capacity across the service system by providing a robust array of training, professional development, organizational technical assistance and consultation, and development of publications and resources to support quality outcomes
- Promising approaches in engaging the business community to develop a range of employment opportunities, including capitalizing on the existing seven regional employment collaboratives and coordinated networks of job developers funded by DDS

- Young adults who are transitioning from school, who, along with their families, are seeking more inclusive employment opportunities and day services to foster community engagement
- Opportunities to capitalize on the current needs of businesses for workers across all sectors that create new opportunities for employment and career advancement

CHALLENGES/AREAS TO BE ADDRESSED

- Workforce shortages, recruitment, and retention facing human service providers resulting in staff vacancies, reduced capacity to offer services (including community-based services), and difficulties recruiting qualified individuals to fill positions.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other tragic events leading to social unrest, which have presented challenges to individuals and their families, including access to services and the related emotional and physical stresses this has created. For providers, the impact on their service delivery capabilities and fiscal infrastructure, stressors on staff, and the health and safety considerations that will need to continue to be addressed as services build back to pre-pandemic levels.
- Gaps and limitations in transportation options, especially accessible transportation, that hinder access to different employment and community-based services and opportunities, particularly in more rural areas.
- Impact of earnings on Social Security and other public benefit programs, an important and common concern of individuals, families, and guardians that needs to be addressed with timely and helpful information and resources.
- Gaps in opportunities for people with higher levels of support needs who may require more clinical and specialized services to be successful in employment and inclusive community settings.
- Retaining a skilled and trained workforce.
- Communication and coordination among employment/day and residential providers to support goals of individuals for employment and community engagement.

COMMITMENTS & RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

DDS has been committed to and engaged in transforming our employment and day service delivery system over many years. We have a strong foundation to continue to build on to offer individualized and meaningful ways for individuals to become employed and participate in their communities. This involves strong partnerships and collaboration with provider agencies, individuals, families, businesses, community organizations, and other state agencies.

Along with continued funding support for employment and day services, we propose the following recommendations/areas for development to support future service directions and enhancements:

- 1) Continued investment by DDS to support a comprehensive approach to capacity-building for the ongoing development and evolution of employment and day services to promote service enhancements and strategic directions that will lead to improved quality services and outcomes. This encompasses the following areas:
 - a. Provision of a robust array of staff training and professional development opportunities to build the skills, knowledge, and expertise among staff providing direct services. Areas of emphasis include community mapping, developing relationships with businesses and community organizations, and the role of staff as community facilitators and job coaches. Exploration of ACRE (Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators) and other certifications to promote career paths and professionalization for staff.
 - b. Organizational consultation and technical assistance for employment and CBDS provider agencies to support redesign of service delivery models and approaches to increase employment opportunities and community participation and engagement.
 - c. Development of learning communities and communities of practice to support service development in specific focus areas, such as customized employment, person-centered career planning and discovery approaches, and integration of technology in service delivery.

- d. Professional development for DDS Service Coordinators to support their roles in facilitating quality employment and day services through person-centered planning and development of Individual Support Plans.
 - e. Training and consultation on development of supported entrepreneurial/self-employment options.
 - f. Education, training and resources on the impact of earnings on Social Security and other public benefits and understanding of work incentives.
 - g. Development of publications, resources, and tools to support quality services and to share promising practices.
 - h. Website and social media presence to share resources, information, and success stories.
- 2) Create linkages and coordinate with DDS's Supportive Technology/Technology Forward initiatives to increase access to technology for individuals receiving services, build skills and expertise among staff supporting individuals to use technology, identify promising practices, and highlight and share effective approaches in using different types of technology to support people in employment and a diverse array of community activities.
 - 3) Promote expanded business and employer engagement in partnership with providers to increase opportunities for a diverse array of employment options.
 - a. Support for Regional Employment Collaboratives who conduct outreach to businesses and facilitate connections with job developers from provider agencies to support job opportunities for individuals.
 - b. Leverage business-to-business connections and build upon successful employer partnerships to expand business sector, skills-based training initiatives.
 - 4) Communication and engagement with individuals and families to provide helpful information about employment and day service delivery options and the flexibilities that may be available, including ways to implement meaningful combinations of provider-delivered employment and day services and community-based, self-directed service options. This includes development of user-friendly materials in multiple languages that are culturally responsive to meet the diversity of individuals and families receiving services and fostering family-to-family connections and peer support.
 - a. Provide information, support, training, and integration of person-centered planning tools and resources such as Charting the LifeCourse, which can be empowering and shares dynamic approaches for individuals and families to develop and support their vision of a "good life."
 - b. Provide information and resources on benefits planning to address questions and converse about loss of public benefits as individuals enter the workforce.
 - 5) Exploration of a range of transportation options to work to address gaps and challenges as well as expand alternative approaches.
 - a. Coordination with the Department of Transportation, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Mass Mobility, and other regional transportation entities.
 - b. Identify and explore other "out-of-the-box" transportation alternatives, such as expanded use of ride-share services, local community transportation options, and other options that may be more flexible and cost effective.
 - c. Explore and identify ways to expand access to accessible transportation options for individuals who are wheelchair users or have other mobility needs.
 - 6) DDS will continue to perform internal reviews of regulations, policies, HCBS Waiver service requirements, quality assurance, and rate setting on a regular basis to promote coordination and alignment with the vision and direction for employment and day services. This will also include guidance on the role of technology and virtual service delivery, when relevant.
 - a. Pursue approaches to promote increased communication and coordination between residential and employment/day services to support successful engagement in services for individuals. This may include flexibility in schedules and transportation. Review "home alone" policies for individuals who live in group residences to determine if there is the potential to create more flexibility in schedules for individuals to be engaged in work or CBDS services.

- 7) DDS will work collaboratively with stakeholders to help address the workforce shortages facing human service providers through exploring and identifying different approaches to promote recruitment, retention, and career advancement of staff providing direct services. This may involve:
 - a. Partnerships with trade organizations, providers, college programs, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Mass Hires Career system, and other human service agencies.
 - b. Providing exposure and experience in human services working with individuals with IDD through a variety of approaches, such as internships, community service, and programs such as the Urban Youth Collaborative.
- 8) Review the existing employment outcome data collection system DDS has established and explore other data elements, metrics, and systems that can be developed internally to track relevant outcomes and progress.
- 9) Continued commitment to engage and strengthen cross-agency collaboration activities at the state and local level to help leverage opportunities and facilitate coordination of services for individuals who receive services from multiple agencies.
- 10) Continuation of the ongoing collaborative workgroup to include DDS and providers, and engage family representatives, self-advocates, and other stakeholders to support implementation of this Blueprint 2.0 working toward enhanced services and outcomes.

The workgroup identified several additional areas for further exploration:

- 1) The development and/or expansion of enrichment and socialization opportunities for individuals to complement their work schedule or day services that can be offered virtually in addition to in-person opportunities.
- 2) As individuals age and the overall population of adults receiving services from DDS increases, it will be important to pursue alternative service options for people of retirement age that are more flexible and responsive to the changing needs and preferences of individuals as they get older.

Partnerships to Expand Opportunities and Build Brighter Futures

Interagency collaboration is important and essential to create a sustainable future of improved employment opportunities and productive and meaningful engagement in all aspects of community life for individuals with ID and Autism. There is a continued commitment to strengthen partnerships and coordination with education and other state agencies that provide employment, education, and other related supportive services. Existing initiatives and efforts at both the statewide and local levels provide a foundation of opportunities and vehicles to enhance cross-agency collaboration that will foster quality outcomes for individuals.

These collaborative efforts are grounded in high expectations and shared values about the importance of employment, the contributions individuals can make in different roles in the community, the benefits of natural supports, and that true inclusion can lead to the development of relationships and friendships. Next, we highlight some specific focus areas for mutual engagement

THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION (DESE)

Areas for continued development include:

- Establishing shared expectations for the vision and goals of competitive integrated employment and community inclusion for students with ID and ASD
- Support for work-based learning experiences while students are still in school, including paid employment, since research has clearly demonstrated that students with disabilities who have paid employment experiences while in school are much more likely to be employed as adults
- Coordination and collaboration in transition planning to support a more seamless movement from school to adult life through working relationships between DDS Transition Service Coordinators/Area Offices, local school systems, students, families, providers, and other relevant state agencies
- Sharing and promoting best practices in transition and the meaningful role of interagency teams, an identified best practice that can support these efforts at the individual student, community, and statewide levels

MASSACHUSETTS REHABILITATION COMMISSION (MRC)

There are many opportunities for MRC and DDS to work together more effectively to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for transition-age youth and adults building on our recently revised Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). This MOA identifies procedures for a coordinated approach to referral, eligibility determination, and service planning and delivery based on joint planning and cost-sharing of services for mutually eligible individuals. DDS provides funding for long-term, ongoing employment supports when needed for individuals who initially access MRC funded services. Other areas of focus include:

- Sharing information and promoting access to the MRC funded Pre-Employment Transition Services, which can provide important foundational skills and experiences for students with disabilities
- Specific job skills/job-driven training programs
- Training on public benefits and benefit counseling services
- Coordination with new initiatives that may be developed, such as the NextGen Careers project

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH (DMH)

Areas of focus include:

- Working jointly to coordinate employment services for individuals who are jointly eligible for DMH and DDS services, primarily for adults with Autism who may have co-occurring mental health challenges
- Collaboration around the activities of the Regional Employment Collaboratives funded by both agencies to expand business and employer relationships

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR BLIND (MCB)

Areas of focus include:

- Working jointly to support the employment goals of individuals who are Blind and jointly eligible for MCB and DDS services
- Building capacity with providers on effective strategies to better assist individuals who are Blind to be successful in employment, including integration of mobility services, accommodations, use of technology and more

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (LWD)

Partnerships to support access to the array of employment services available through the MassHires career centers, including specific job training programs, summer employment, internships and apprenticeship opportunities, and employer connections.

Conclusion

Massachusetts is part of a national movement to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including ID and Autism, and to transform the way day services are delivered. Through engagement, partnership, and support of all stakeholders (individuals, families, DDS providers, businesses, community organizations, state agencies) we will be able to move forward in implementing these strategic directions to realize the vision of valued roles for all individuals through increased employment and meaningful and inclusive opportunities in the community. This Blueprint is a road map that builds upon strong person-centered planning approaches, fosters choice and the self-determination of individuals, strengthens partnerships with businesses and community organizations, and provides resources that support continued professional staff development and capacity-building of providers to deliver high-quality services that assist people in achieving the positive personal outcomes they desire.

Appendix

Employment/Day Services Work Group Members

- **Christine Boisvert**, DDS Middlesex West Area Office, Supervisor
- **Daniel Burke**, Lifeworks Inc., President and CEO
- **Kristin Falvey**, Bay Cove Human Services, Director of Day and Employment Services
- **Rosalie Edes**, The Arc of Massachusetts, Family Member
- **Char Gentes**, Riverside Industries, past Executive Director
- **Jennifer Killeen**, DDS North Shore Area Office, Area Director
- **Gina Kos**, Sunshine Village, Executive Director
- **Joseph Krajewski**, Community Connections, Inc. Chief Operations Officer
- **Kathy Marques**, Northeast Arc Community, Employment Division Director
- **Amanda Nichols**, Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers, Vice President
- **Elizabeth Sandblom**, DDS Central Office, Assistant Commissioner for Operations
- **Sharon Smith**, Work Inc., Chief Executive Officer
- **Cindy Thomas**, Institute for Community Inclusion, Director
- **Mary Valachovic**, The Arc of Greater Plymouth and Upper Cape Cod, President and CEO; Massachusetts Sibling Support Network, Director; Family Member
- **Margaret Van Gelder**, DDS Central Office, Consultant and Former Director of Employment and Family Support
- **Kathleen Walker**, DDS Central Office, Statewide Director of Employment and Day Services

Definitions

COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT: (WIOA)

Work performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self-employment) that pays minimum wage or above, and not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work to individuals who have similar training, experience, and skills:

- with eligibility for the level of benefits provided to other employees in similar positions
- at a location where employees interact with other people who are not individuals with disabilities to the same extent as other employees without disabilities in comparable positions
- as appropriate, presents opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions

Supported employment is competitive integrated employment for those with more significant disabilities that involves the provision of ongoing support services.

Customized employment is supported employment that involves matching an individual's strengths to an employer's needs through specialized types of arrangements and negotiations. This includes:

- customizing a job description based on current employer needs or previously unidentified and unmet employer needs
- developing a set of job duties, work schedule, job arrangement, and specifics of supervision
- providing employment services and supports to facilitate the placement at the job location

CENTER FOR MEDICAID SERVICES (CMS) FINAL COMMUNITY SETTINGS RULE

CMS Final Community Settings Rule ensures that individuals receiving long-term services and supports through home and community-based service (HCBS) programs under the 1915(c), 1915(i), and 1915(k) Medicaid authorities have full access to benefits of community living and the opportunity to receive services in the most integrated setting. The rule goes into effect March 17, 2023.

The final rule requires that all home and community-based settings meet certain qualifications. Settings must:

- be integrated in and supports full access to the greater community
- be selected by the individual from among setting options
- ensure individual rights of privacy, dignity and respect, and freedom from coercion and restraint
- provide opportunities to seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings and control personal resources
- optimize autonomy and independence in making life choices
- facilitate choice regarding services and who provides them

SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills include attributes, personal qualities, and behaviors that help individuals interact with others and succeed in the workplace. Examples of soft skills include following instructions, reliability, getting a job done on time, taking initiative, teamwork, perseverance, and others. This contrasts with hard skills, which refers to the job-related knowledge and abilities that employees need to perform their job duties effectively

Resources:

- [Employment First MA website](#)
- Charting the LifeCourse websites
 - » [Life Course Tools](#)
 - » [Arc of Mass Charting the Life Course](#)
- [MA DDS Self Direction](#)
- [Ensuring Excellence in Community-Based Day Supports: A Guide for Service Providers and Staff](#)
- [Employment and Employment Supports: A Guide to Ensuring Informed Choice for Individuals with Disabilities](#)
- [Raising Expectations for Better Futures](#)
- [Supportive Technology](#)

