

**Fiscal Year 2019**

**Progress Report on DDS Employment First Initiative**

**January 2019**

**Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services**

**Progress Report on Employment First Initiative**

**December 2018**

**Line Item 5920-2025 of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 General Appropriation Act** requires *that the department shall issue a report, not later than December 14, 2018, to the house and senate committees on ways and means and the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities regarding: (i) eligible individuals who transitioned to community-based employment in fiscal year 2018 and those projected for fiscal year 2019; and (ii) the number and types of transitions funded by the pilot program since its inception, delineated by fiscal year.*

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has been engaged in implementation of the Employment First Initiative since January 2014 as outlined in the vision and goals articulated in the “*Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Disabilities with Intellectual Disabilities in Massachusetts,”* that was issued in November 2013. The Blueprint outlined a four-year plan through June 2018. DDS will continue to build on the foundation that has been established to continually expand integrated employment opportunities for the individuals we support through the ongoing development and quality enhancement of the employment and day services funded through our budget appropriation in Line Item 5920-2025.

Highlights of progress during this period include:

* The complete phase out of funding for sheltered workshop services which occurred as of June 30th, 2016, by transitioning about 3,000 individuals from this service into individual or group supported employment, and/or community-based day support services.
* An increase in the total number of individuals who are now employed in jobs at businesses in the community where they earn minimum wage or higher and receive the same benefits as other employees. This was accomplished through the assistance and ongoing supports delivered by DDS funded providers of Individual Supported Employment Services.
* An increase in the number of individuals who are earing minimum wage or higher in Small Group Supported Employment Services from 49.5% in 2014, to 71% in 2018.
* Continued evolution of Community-Based Day Support services to provide a diverse array of inclusive and meaningful experiences and skill- building activities that support individuals on their pathway to obtaining future employment through exploration of interests, development of work skills and habits, and social, communication and independent living skills. These programs provide an opportunity for individuals to have experiences that help build their resume to serve as a stepping stone to employment, as well as provide structured and supervised enrichment activities for individuals working part-time who need this type of support.
1. In FY 2018 a total of 268 individuals entered into Individual Integrated Employment.

It is expected that a similar number of adults will transition to community-based employment in FY 2019. There was a slight decrease in the number of individuals who worked in Group Supported Employment sites at businesses in the community during FY 2018. There are several factors contributing to this trend including: the increase in the state’s minimum wage has placed higher expectations on the productivity level for workers in these positions; there may be some natural limits on the types of jobs and businesses that lend themselves to using this model of group supported employment; there may be fewer individuals splitting their time with individual supported employment or community based day support services; and ultimately the goal is to help as many individuals as possible move into individual integrated employment, and this trend may partially reflect this movement of individuals into jobs in the community.

1. Number of Individuals engaged in Employment and Day Services across fiscal years:

The table below provides information on the number of individuals currently participating in Individual and Small Group Supported Employment services and Community Based Day Support programs as of November 2018, as well as an overview of engagement and participation in these services from June 2014.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Service Type  | June 2014 | June 2015 | June 2016 | June 2017 | October 2018  |
| Individual Supported Employment | 2,748 | 2,900 | 3,146 | 3,388 | 3,656 |
| Small Group Supported Employment | 2,911 | 3,103 | 3,367 | 3,395 | 3,300 |
| Community-Based Day Support Services\* | 3,748 | 5,116 | 6,137 | 6,482 | 6,907 |

**Note:** Many individuals participate in more than one of these services across the week, so these numbers represent a duplicated count of individuals participating in the corresponding service. Example: an individual may work at a part-time job three days/week and attend a Community Based Day Support program the other 2 days.

\*About 47% of the people who attend Community-Based Day Support program services also participate in individual or group supported employment services.

During this time period, more individuals have successfully obtained jobs and entered individual or small group supported employment at businesses across the Commonwealth. The transition of individuals from sheltered workshop services into employment and new inclusive community service options was facilitated both by the redirection of the sheltered workshop funding, and new funding in FY 2015 and FY 2016 in the 5920-2025 account, as well as the $1 million pilot funding during these same two fiscal years, which totaled $6 million. Since FY 2017 this funding has been annualized and integrated into the 5920-2025 employment and day services account, providing the maintenance fiscal resources for the ongoing delivery of these program services for individuals supported by DDS.

Through our efforts to develop more integrated employment opportunities a number of challenges have been identified that will need to continue to be addressed. These include: difficulty obtaining job opportunities for individuals with more significant disabilities and support needs, including those with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and Autism with behavioral challenges who require more customized work opportunities and more intensive supports; workforce issues that many providers are experiencing which result in higher vacancies and turn-over that have an impact on access to and continuity of services; access to transportation and, to enable individuals to get to their jobs and/or participate in other community activities; concerns with the impact on Social Security and other public benefits when individuals earn more income.

Since FY 2015, DDS also made substantive investments to support the capacity-building and development of provider agencies who deliver these employment and day services. To facilitate and assist in the restructuring of employment and day services to lead to more integrated employment and inclusive and meaningful community experiences to serve as a pathway to future employment DDS has provided the following initiatives through partnership with providers and other entities:

* Technical Assistance and Consultation has been provided to 25 Employment and CBDS Provider Agencies focused on transformation of services and quality program design and development to foster increased integrated employment outcomes.
* More than 2,500 provider and DDS staff have participated in a diverse array of employment-related training opportunities that have encompassed multi-day workshops for job developers and job coaches, trainings with subject matter experts on program design and community development for managers, bet practices and other specialized topical areas, both in-person and through webinars.
* Support for the development of five Regional Employment Collaboratives across the state which have a cross-disability focus. Employer Liaisons engage in outreach to businesses and work collaboratively with job developers at provider agencies through Job Developer Networks they establish to help streamline and improve access to employment opportunities. These Collaboratives have been instrumental in developing a workforce training initiative with CVS Pharmacy to offer a retail skills training program that has led to the successful job placement of individuals at local CVS stores

DDS will continue to improve upon these training, technical assistance, and other related initiatives to promote and support quality services and positive employment outcomes for the individuals to whom we provide support. DDS will also work with the Employment and Community-Based Day Support Provider Agencies and Regional Employment Collaboratives to develop innovative ways to identify, solicit and expand our partnerships with potential employers across the state.

**Conclusion**

There continues to be consistent growth in the number of individuals who are employed in jobs at businesses in the community through the assistance and supports offered by individual supported employment, group supported employment, and community based day support agencies. More individuals with intellectual and developmental disability are becoming valued employees and productive and contributing members of their communities as a result of these efforts. However, it is also recognized that we have been challenged to develop integrated paid employment opportunities and more inclusive community experiences for some individuals with more significant challenges and support needs. Likewise, there continue to be some individuals and families who express preference for employment and day services to occur in separate, center-based programs and have reservations around pursuing work and other types of skill development and community experiences.

DDS will continue to build on the foundation and progress accomplished over the past four years in implementing the *Blueprint for Success*. The pilot funding was instrumental in serving as a bridge from sheltered workshops to community employment services, and DDS maintains its commitment to our Employment First initiative. These services are now an integral part of the array of the programs and supports funded through the 5920-2025 employment and day account. Continued funding for Individual and Group Supported Employment and Community based Day Services provides the necessary resources to assist more individuals to successfully transition to and successfully maintain jobs at businesses in the community. DDS will be issuing a new procurement for employment and day services this fiscal year for a start date of July 1, 2019.

The progress and changes that have occurred reflect positively on the hard work, efforts, and collaboration of all involved, including employment providers, individuals with disabilities, families, employers and DDS staff. It is recognized there is still more work to do and DDS will continue to work with all parties to help support expansion of integrated employment opportunities at businesses in the community.