

**Fiscal Year 2020**

**Progress Report on DDS Employment First Initiative**

December 2019

**Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services**

**Progress Report on Employment First Initiative**

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**Line Item 5920-2025 of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 General Appropriation Act** requires *that the department shall issue a report, not later than December 16, 2019, 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 2019 and those projected for fiscal year 2020; 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 “*Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Disabilities with Intellectual Disabilities in Massachusetts.”* The Blueprint outlined a four-year plan to phase out sheltered workshop services. On June 30, 2016, the Department successfully met this goal and transitioned approximately 3,000 individuals from sheltered workshops to individual or group-supported employment and/or community-based day support services. This transition was facilitated in large part by increased budget allocations and pilot funding in FY2015 and FY2016. Since the closure of the workshops in FY2017, this funding has been annualized and integrated into the 5920-2025 employment and day services account, providing the fiscal resources for the ongoing delivery of these program services.

Highlights of progress during this period includes:

* An increase in the total number of individuals now employed, earning minimum wage or higher, and receiving the same benefits as other employees;
* An increase in the number of individuals earning minimum wage or higher in small Group-Supported employment services to 71%; and
* Continued evolution of Community-Based Day Support programs that support individuals on their pathway to future employment via skill-building and other meaningful activities.

1. In FY2019, a total of 242 individuals entered Individual Integrated Employment. It is expected that a similar number of adults will transition to community-based employment in FY2020.
2. Although the pilot has been completed for the past 3 years, the following chart highlights the number of individuals engaged in Employment and Day Services from 2014 to present:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Service Type** | **June 2014** | **June 2015** | **June 2016** | **June**  **2017** | **October 2018** | **October**  **2019** |
| Individual Supported Employment | 2,748 | 2,900 | 3,146 | 3,388 | 3,656 | 3,898 |
| Small Group Supported Employment | 2,911 | 3,103 | 3,367 | 3,395 | 3,300 | 3,282 |
| Community-Based Day Support Services\* | 3,748 | 5,116 | 6,137 | 6,482 | 6,907 | 7,318 |

***\*About 47% of the people who attend Community-Based Day Support programs also participate in***

***individual or group supported employment services.***

Although the number of individuals in integrated employment settings continue to grow each year, challenges exist and continue to be addressed by DDS and its network of providers, specifically:

* Difficulty obtaining job opportunities for individuals with more significant disabilities who require more customized work opportunities and intensive supports;
* Workforce challenges that many human services providers are experiencing which result in recruitment and turn-over that have an impact on continuity of services;
* Transportation access; and
* Concerns with the impact on Social Security and other public benefits when individuals earn more income (cliff effect).

Since FY2015, DDS also made substantive investments to support the capacity-building and development of provider agencies who facilitate employment and day services, including:

* Technical assistance and consultation focused on quality program design and development to foster increased integrated employment outcomes;
* A diverse array of employment-related training opportunities for job developers and job coaches with subject matter experts on program design and community development, best practices and other specialized topical areas; and
* Creation of five Regional Employment Collaboratives that work with agency job developers to streamline and improve access to employment opportunities with local business communities. For example, the 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.

This year, the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities established a subcommittee to examine existing services and supports to identify best practices and explore expansion opportunities to increase the number of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. DDS was asked to participate and we continue to advise the subcommittee on ways to support individuals in accessing and maintaining employment while also increasing employment opportunities and incentivizing businesses in all sectors. In addition to working with our Legislative partners, DDS continues to engage our provider community, employers, and individuals to support expansion of integrated employment opportunities and evaluate how our systems can best serve our individuals in finding and maintaining meaningful employment and inclusive day programming opportunities.

**Conclusion**

More individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are becoming valued employees and are able to participate in and better contribute to their communities as a result of these efforts. However, we continue to seek solutions to challenges to developing integrated paid employment opportunities and inclusive community experiences for individuals with more significant support needs. Likewise, there continue to be some individuals and families who express preference for employment and day services that occur in separate, center-based programs and have reservations around pursuing work and other types of experiences in the community. DDS will continue to build on the foundation and progress accomplished over the past five years in implementing the *Blueprint for Success*.