

**A REPORT TO
THE SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**THE COMPONENTS OF
EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS AND FAILURE
AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
IN THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA**

**PART FOUR: BARRIERS AND SUCCESS FACTORS
AS REPORTED BY PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD**

**Produced by
System Wide Solutions, Inc.
for
The College of Social Work
University of South Carolina**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report consists of five Parts. Part One, delivered on March 31, 2005, covered issues associated with the Medicaid eligibility process. Parts Two and Three, delivered on May 31, 2005, covered the barriers to working and the factors accounting for success at working as reported by persons with disabilities who are working and ones who are not. Part Four, delivered on July 31, 2005, reports the barriers and success factors as reported by professionals in the field. Part Five, to be delivered on October 15, 2005, will report on the findings of a survey of employers. A final summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations will accompany the final report in October 2005.

In a time when South Carolina must compete economically with the entire world, the state cannot afford to overlook any potential worker. The skills and education of everyone of working age is important to producing a future that will allow South Carolina to achieve its economic objectives. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 514,963 working age persons with disabilities residing in the state of South Carolina. They make up 23% of the state's working age citizens. Almost half of these people (45%) are currently not employed. Many of these individuals who are not employed have job skills and want to work. These unemployed persons with disabilities are a resource that is not tapped by the State at this time. Each of these who enter the workforce becomes a taxpayer who can provide greater support for him or herself and his or her family. Over time, many of these individuals will no longer require health care or other support from the state, reducing costs and benefiting their fellow citizens.

The primary research questions for Part Four are:

- What are the barriers to persons with disabilities working in South Carolina?
- What are the factors that lead to obtaining and maintaining employment among persons with disabilities in South Carolina?

There are three recommendations in the report.

1. It is recommended that at least one worker in each SC DHHS area office be trained to be a benefits coordinator and given the authority to carry out those functions. It is recommended that benefits coordinators and consumers make wider use of technology to understand the complex system, such as the *WorkWorld* software developed by the Employment Support Institute, School of Business, Virginia Commonwealth University.
2. It is recommended that methods be developed for overcoming the reluctance among some persons with disabilities to work and the reluctance of their families to support them in working. This should begin with coordinating with the existing work going on in this area, with additional work done to create solutions particular to South Carolina.
3. It is recommended that a group of disability and health care funding professionals, business and financial leaders, elected officials, academic experts, and persons with disabilities be formed to develop a comprehensive response to the barriers that mitigate against persons

with disabilities working and to further develop the positives that support persons with disabilities working. The beginning point for that group would be this series of reports. This group would have as its first priority, balancing the costs and benefits of modifying these barriers and positives so that the state achieves the greatest possible use of the productive capacity of persons with disabilities and reduces the associated costs to the state. Among the issues that the group would examine are:

- a. Income and asset limits for publicly supported health care for persons with disabilities.
- b. Incentives and methods to increase the private health care coverage of persons with disabilities who are employed.
- c. Private and public methods to support persons with disabilities who wish to start their own businesses.
- d. Private and public methods to enhance the employment related training, education and skill development of persons with disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Project

In March of 2004, the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SC DHHS) received a \$500,000 Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) authorized by the *Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999*. The goal of the MIG is to provide resources to break down the barriers that stand between people with disabilities and employment in the community. The grant was written by an interagency group composed of representatives from the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN), the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the SC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Employment Security Commission (SCES), Commission for the Blind (COB), Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Education (DOE), Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), and Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities (P&A).

The MIG is governed by a Work Plan that includes 25 activities. Among these activities are three that are designed to create a base of information about the barriers that exist to persons with disabilities working and what factors account for success of persons with disabilities working. This report provides that base of information.

The Report

This report consists of five Parts. Part One, delivered on March 31, 2005, covered issues associated with the Medicaid eligibility process. Parts Two and Three, delivered on May 31, 2005, covered the barriers to working and the factors accounting for success at working as reported by persons with disabilities who are working and ones who are not. Part Four, delivered on July 31, 2005, reports the barriers and success factors as reported by professionals in the field. Part Five, to be delivered on October 15, 2005, will report on the findings of a survey of employers. A final summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations will accompany the final report in October.

Conducting the Research and Report Production

The research was conducted and reports produced by System Wide Solutions, Inc. under subcontract to the University of South Carolina. The College of Social Work of the University of South Carolina provided expert advice from faculty as well as master's and doctoral level students to support the research. System Wide Solutions (SWS) has been working with the College of Social Work and the SC DHHS since July of 1997 on research, policy, and evaluation issues regarding individuals with disabilities who are receiving Medicaid support.

Importance of Persons with Disabilities Working in South Carolina

In a time when South Carolina must compete economically with the entire world, the state cannot afford to overlook any potential worker. The skills and education of everyone of working age is important to producing a future that will allow South Carolina to achieve its economic objectives. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 514,963 working age persons with disabilities residing in the state of South Carolina. They make up 23% of the state's working age citizens. Almost half of these people (45%) are currently not employed. Many of these individuals who are not employed have job skills and want to work. These unemployed persons with disabilities are a resource that is not tapped by the State at this time. Each of these who enter the workforce becomes a taxpayer who can provide greater support for him or herself and his or her family. Over time, many of these individuals will no longer require health care or other support from the state, reducing costs and benefiting their fellow citizens.

Being productively employed has a high value in our society. With employment comes income and independence, but just as importantly, employment brings dignity, recognition and personal pride. Persons with disabilities should be given the opportunity to enjoy these benefits of employment as much as anyone else in the state.

It has to be recognized at the outset, however, that there are many persons with disabilities who will not be able to work fulltime, or possibly at all, for physical or developmental reasons. It is everyone's responsibility to provide means and methods for those who cannot work in traditional employment to achieve everything they can achieve and not simply to discard their talents and experience.

METHODOLOGY FOR PART FOUR: BARRIERS AND SUCCESS FACTORS AS REPORTED BY PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD

Research Questions

The primary research questions for Part Four are:

- What are the barriers to persons with disabilities working in South Carolina?
- What are the factors that lead to obtaining and maintaining employment among persons with disabilities in South Carolina?

Protocols

An interview schedule for professionals was developed that covers the research questions. The instrument was then incorporated into a full protocol. This protocol may be found in Appendix One.

Interviewees

There were five types of professionals selected to be interviewed. These are:

- Someone whose job is to help persons with disabilities secure and keep employment.
- Someone whose job is to influence policy about persons with disabilities securing and keeping employment.
- Someone whose job is to prepare persons with disabilities for employment.
- Someone in another state whose job is to manage a successful program that supports persons with disabilities to secure and keep work.
- Someone whose job is to help persons with disabilities establish their own businesses.

A total of five interviews were conducted. One of the interviews was conducted in two segments, about one week apart. Two interviews were held in South Carolina; one in Ohio (an individual who had just moved from South Carolina); one in Vermont; and one in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Interview Methods

The primary consideration in the interview methods was to gather as much information as possible related to the research questions. There were two ways in which this was assured.

- Interviews occurred at a place chosen by the person or persons being interviewed. Two were conducted in SWS offices and the remainder in the office of the interviewee.
- The interview schedule and protocol (see Appendix One) was designed to allow the interviewees to speak in their own style. The interviewers held a conversation with the interviewees ensuring that all questions were answered, but not forcing the conversation to follow the order of the questions.

Analysis of Interviews

The notes of the interviewers were used to write process recordings of the interviews. The process recordings were read by two staff members of the research team. The team members identified what they believed to be the issues raised and described in the interviews. The team members then met and discussed the themes they identified until consensus was reached. Findings were then written. Upon the completion of the findings being written, the team members developed their individual findings and recommendations. The team members met and discussed the findings and recommendations until they reached consensus. The report was then completed.

FINDINGS FOR PART FOUR: BARRIERS AND SUCCESS FACTORS AS REPORTED BY PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD

Description of the Interviewees

Interviewee One is the director of a program designed to support persons with disabilities to find and keep employment in South Carolina. Interviewee Two provides information and support to persons with disabilities who wish to work in South Carolina. Interviewee Three provided education and case management for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in South Carolina to prepare them for work and presently does the same work in Ohio. Interviewee Four is the director of the Vermont state government program designed to help persons with disabilities find and keep employment. Interviewee Five is the director of a program in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada that supports persons with disabilities who wish to start their own businesses.

Introduction to Interview Findings

The interviews took place concurrently with interviews with persons with disabilities. The interviews with the persons with disabilities informed the interviews with professionals and vice versa. For example, when some of the persons with disabilities mentioned a desire to have their own businesses, a professional who directs a program that helps persons with disabilities start their own businesses was identified and interviewed.

The interview findings are divided into two parts. The first part is barriers to working identified by the professionals. The second is solutions to those barriers identified by the professionals.

Barriers to Working Themes

Difficulties with Benefit Planning

The systems that provide support and benefits for persons with difficulties are complex and sometimes contradictory. Many eligibility workers do not fully understand all of the different systems with which persons with disabilities must contend. Often when persons with disabilities go to work, they don't know how their benefits will be affected until they have worked for a period of time. There is no central point for information that is updated on a regular basis and that is available to eligibility workers and case managers.

Lack of Coordination of Services

Many eligibility workers and case managers have incorrect or limited information regarding the various programs and incentives available for persons with disabilities who wish to work. Medicaid for the Working Disabled, for example, is not understood by many eligibility workers and is therefore not recommended by them. The same is true for other services. Case managers

and other workers are very familiar with their own areas, but have much less familiarity with the services of other organizations, and therefore have limited ability to coordinate services with others. Improved coordination would both better serve the persons with disabilities and would save effort and resources.

Limited Socialization to Working

Persons with disabilities often are socialized to a non-working environment. For persons who have had disabilities all of their lives, families may over-protect them, job training may not be available, or job training may be provided but follow-up to actually secure appropriate work may not be provided. The system to prepare young people with disabilities to enter the workforce is piecemeal and not fully integrated.

For persons who acquire disabilities later in life, it is often difficult to accept a different type of work than that for which they were prepared prior to acquiring the disability. In addition, the person with a disability often lives in fear of losing benefits, especially medical benefits, and not being able to get them back. Persons with disabilities often spend their time with others who are in the same position they are in, which tends to reinforce a new cultural identity that is not associated with employment. This is a natural human reaction, but is also a reflection of the marginalization of at least some disabilities among the rest of society. (It should be pointed out that US society is much more accepting of disabilities than many other societies.)

Fear of Losing Access to Healthcare

Regular and continuous access to healthcare is literally a life and death issue for many persons with disabilities. All other decisions, including whether to work or not, are subordinate to the need for healthcare. Since the US does not automatically provide healthcare for all residents, healthcare availability greatly complicates decisions about employment for persons with disabilities.

Very Limited Opportunities for Self-Employment

Self-employment is an area of great promise for persons with disabilities. Self-employment allows greater control over working conditions and work hours, takes advantage of the talents of persons with disabilities, and opens the door to access to the mainstream culture. Creating one's own business does require two things that are difficult to come by - capital and business expertise.

Solutions to Barriers to Working Themes

Benefit Planning and Coordination of Services

The complexity of the present system that serves persons with disabilities requires a great deal of knowledge and skill on the part of professionals to help persons with disabilities return to work. Many states have put effort into hiring and training benefits coordinators who help persons with disabilities wend their way through the system. South Carolina has used federal funds to provide a few benefits coordinators at Vocational Rehabilitation. The benefits coordinators provided appear to be an essential part of helping persons with disabilities get and keep jobs and more are needed. Since SC DHHS eligibility workers are in contact with many of the persons with disabilities in the state, it is sensible to have these workers be the source of planning and coordination. It is also important to provide job aids to eligibility workers and case managers to help them understand the system and keep up with changes.

Socialization to Working

The specifics of the socialization of persons with disabilities to work is not well understood. Studies are now being conducted in at least three states with MIG funds to try to understand the phenomenon and to develop methods for overcoming the socialization that keeps some persons with disabilities from working.

Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare for persons with disabilities, especially those who are working, is more than the State's responsibility. It is also the responsibility of private businesses, which could greatly benefit from employing more persons with disabilities.

Opportunities for Self-Employment

Many persons with disabilities have talents, education, training, and abilities that could be marketed. There are special circumstances for persons with disabilities becoming entrepreneurs that need to be recognized. However, the basic issues are the same as with anyone starting their own business - how to do a business plan, how to secure financing, how to market one's service or product, and so on. There are organizations that help the new entrepreneur learn about these issues, and there are many individuals who would probably be willing to volunteer to help. What is needed is an organization that will put the resources together with the persons with disabilities, and then support the persons with disabilities as they begin their business.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that at least one worker in each SC DHHS area office be trained to be a benefits coordinator and given the authority to carry out those functions. It is recommended that benefits coordinators and consumers make wider use of technology to understand the complex system, such as the *WorkWorld* software developed by the Employment Support Institute, School of Business, Virginia Commonwealth University.
2. It is recommended that methods for overcoming the reluctance among some persons with disabilities to work and the reluctance of their families to support them in working be developed. This should begin with coordinating with the existing work going on in this area, with additional work done to create solutions particular to South Carolina.
3. It is recommended that a group of disability and health care funding professionals, business and financial leaders, elected officials, academic experts, and persons with disabilities be formed to develop a comprehensive response to the barriers that mitigate against persons with disabilities working and to further develop the positives that support persons with disabilities working. The beginning point for that group would be this series of reports. This group would have as its first priority balancing the costs and benefits of modifying these barriers and positives so that the state achieves the greatest possible use of the productive capacity of persons with disabilities and reduces the associated costs to the state. Among the issues that the group would examine are:
 - a. Income and asset limits for publicly supported health care for persons with disabilities.
 - b. Incentives and methods to increase the private health care coverage of persons with disabilities who are employed.
 - c. Private and public methods to support persons with disabilities who wish to start their own businesses.
 - d. Private and public methods to enhance the employment related training, education and skill development of persons with disabilities.

APPENDIX ONE

PROTOCOL

Location _____ Date _____ Interviewee Name _____

Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Individual Interview Protocol For Professionals in the Field

Goal: What is the knowledge of persons who are professionals in the disabilities services field about the barriers to and supports for persons with disabilities working.

Supplies needed: Directions or map and contact phone number for meeting place, copy of protocol questions for staff members, SWS business cards, legal pad and pen for note-taking.

Roles: Interviewer One explains the project, keeps interview on track with questions and prompts. Interviewer Two takes notes. Interviewers switch roles as appropriate

1. **Introduction** – Thank participant. Briefly state your name and introduce scribe.

2. **State purpose of project** - to determine what needs to be done to make it easier for persons with disabilities who want to work to be successful at getting and keeping a job. That we are doing similar interviews with other professionals.
Interviewer will be asking a few questions and the participant will have a chance to say a much or as little as he or she wishes about that
Time frame will be approximately one hour.
Assure confidentiality.
Ask if any questions about the reason you are here and what we will be doing.
Tell who/how to contact someone if you have questions - Distribute business cards.

3. **Warm-up questions**
Ask what the professional's organization does. Get more specificity about activities if needed.

4. **Key question** – Tell us about you think are the barriers to persons with disabilities working and what factors help persons with disabilities get and keep work

(Allow people to answer as they feel comfortable doing. Use follow up questions when necessary to make sure all of the issues we are interested in get covered.)

5. **Follow-Up Questions**
 - A. What does your organization do to help people get and keep jobs?

 - B. What are the external barriers (outside your organization) that interfere with persons with disabilities working?

 - C. What are the internal barriers (inside your organization) that interfere with persons with disabilities working?

D. What do you see as the government's attitude about persons with disabilities working?

1. What is government doing to help?
2. What is government doing that hinders?

E. What do you think employers' attitudes are about persons with disabilities working?

F. What could employers do to help?

G. What could employers do that would not be helpful?

6. **Wrap-up** - Summarize major themes, thank respondent for his or her input.

Adjourn no later than 90 minutes after start time.

Label notes with name of participant, location participant number and date.

Completion: All notes are to be kept in locked Medicaid Infrastructure file. Interviewers prepare process recording and put into file. Advise Andrea when each process recording is finished. E-mail process recording to George and Sarah.