

APPENDIX A

Employment First Policy: Knowing Where We Have Been---In Order to Get to Where We Want to Be.

Following the approval of the Rhode Island Global Consumer Choice Compact Waiver, and in an effort to provide opportunities to meet the needs of all Rhode Islanders, including those with disabilities, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) formed a 65 member Global Waiver Task Force that first met On May 12, 2009.

¹ The Task Force had three main goals:

- 1) re-balancing the Medicaid-funded long-term care system to increase home and community-based care
- 2) ensuring all Medicaid beneficiaries have a medical home and that care is coordinated
- 3) and procuring services in ways that reward high quality care and ensure a cost-effective program²

Six workgroups were created to complete the work needed to support and achieve those goals, one of which was Employment. Members of the Taskforce and any concerned citizen joined a workgroup to develop recommendations that could be specific enough to become budget articles, Medicaid rule changes, or legislative proposal.

The Task Force charge to the Employment Workgroup, chaired by Elaina Goldstein of Rhodes to Independence, was to develop recommendations in the following focus areas:

- How to increase employment among Medicaid beneficiaries with disabilities.
- How to support Medicaid beneficiaries with disabilities who are working.

The Employment Workgroup, through consensus, agreed that the overarching goal was to make Rhode Island an "Employment First" state for all people with disabilities. The following definition of Employment First is as follows:

Rhode Island Employment First Goal: "To improve competitive employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities through demand-side business, strategies that ensure any individual with a disability who wants to work has the proper skills, tools and access to training and employment opportunities."

¹ On January 16, 2009, Rhode Island Global Consumer Choice Compact Waiver (Global Waiver) was approved by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The Global Waiver establishes a new federal/state compact that gives the state greater flexibility to provide services in a more cost-effective way that will better meet the needs of Rhode Islanders.

² Executive Office of Health and Human Services, RI Global Consumer Choice Compact 1115 Demonstration Waiver, Taskforce Meeting #1 Minutes

As part of moving the Employment First agenda forward and bringing together the stakeholders necessary to make Employment First a reality, Rhodes to Independence, the Rhode Island Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), and the Employment Workgroup of the Rhode Island Consumer Choice Compact Global Waiver Task Force (GWTF) spearheaded a statewide discussion entitled the *Rhode Island Employment First Summit*. The two goals of the Summit were:

- To bring together key constituents throughout Rhode Island who believe strongly in the idea that integrated employment in the workforce at competitive wages should be the expected and first choice of Rhode Islanders with disabilities.
- To change conventional thinking about what is possible by sharing new methods to narrow the employment gap and increase the productivity of all people with disabilities.

An Employment First Summit, held on December 9, 2009, included over 118 citizens from across Rhode Island. Stakeholders in attendance included state departments, employment services providers, employers, policy makers, neighborhood and community leaders, people with disabilities, directors of state agencies, advocates, and family members. Through two group breakout sessions and the focus questions for the second session was, *what will it take to increase the participation of Rhode Islanders with disabilities in the workforce?* Responses by each breakout group were all recorded and then categorized into ten overall themes listed below:

- Engage, Educate and Encourage Employers to Hire People with Disabilities
- Change Attitudes Regarding the Employment Capabilities of People with Disabilities
- Develop a Comprehensive Employment First Policy
- Strengthen and Formalize Collaborative Efforts
- Increase and Enhance the Capacity of Employment Providers
- Expand School-to-Work Transitions
- Educate Stakeholders on Government Work Incentive Programs
- Support Disability Advocacy
- Improve Transportation System for Workers with Disabilities
- Braid and Blend Funding Streams

The ten themes were then prioritized by the Summit attendees using a grid like the one found in Richard Nelson Bolles' book, *What Color is Your Parachute?* The top five strategies were selected as a starting point to advance the Employment First agenda. Individuals migrated to the group they thought they could make the greatest contribution and developed a specific goal and objectives that could be completed by the next Summit in October. They are listed below:

Develop a comprehensive Employment First policy for Rhode Island. *Employment First Policy Work Group:*

Goal: Draft Legislation based on findings

Objectives:

- Obtain Technical Assistance from States who have Employment First Policies
- Identify items that need to be included and draft policy that will become law

Improve transportation systems for workers with disabilities. *Transportation Work Group*

Goal: Report where are we today? Do we have systems in place working well?

Objectives:

- Research past and current transportation initiatives; specifically the "Coordinated Plan for Public Transit-Human Services Transportation in RI"
- Report on best practices with in the State currently; Maher, Trudeau.

Increase and enhance the capacity of employment providers. *Provider Work Group*

Goal: To create a consumer guide for employment services.

Objectives:

- Determine a base line of current employment services available state wide
- Perform an environmental scan of current Employment Training programs available locally and nationally; identify gaps and opportunities for increased employment outcomes.

Expand and enhance school to work transitions. *Transition Work Group*

Goal: To create a user friendly guide for youth, families and educators around employment opportunities.

Objectives:

- Increase knowledge of youth, families and educators around employment opportunities concerning transition by providing accessible, user friendly and accurate information.
- In partnership with the RI Department of Education, create an advocacy plan to introduce vocational exposures and opportunities beginning in the elementary-middle school years.

Engage, educate and encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. *Employer Work Group*

Goal: Develop employer friendly, vehicles to help employers and job seekers with disabilities connect

Objectives:

- Host an employer focus group to solicit employer input
- Create a communication /employer education plan that provides the information, resources and supports available to successfully recruit, employ and retain employees with disabilities.