

IOWA BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

DIF - SWTCIE Grant Updates

Introduction to the Grant

By Brandy McOmber, IVRS Project Director

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) was awarded nearly \$14 million under a Federal grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The intent of the grant is to assist states in supporting innovative activities aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment (CIE) for youth and adults with disabilities, and moving away from a focus on subminimum wage.

The five-year project in Iowa was titled the Iowa Blueprint for Change (IBC) and will advance and improve statewide systems so that Iowans with disabilities have access to CIE opportunities that lead to economic security. The project will accomplish this goal by focusing on systems-level interventions to promote State policies, funding, and practices that support CIE within the State as the first and preferred outcome for all Iowans with disabilities. The team will also utilize participant-level interventions to increase individual readiness for, and access to, CIE for these individuals.

IBC includes six objectives, all of which are listed in this newsletter. Agencies cannot work in silos, and IVRS will partner with as many agencies and stakeholders as are willing, to accomplish these objectives. There are also several key implementation contracts involved within this project including Griffin-Hammis Associates (GHA), the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), and the University of Iowa Center for Evaluation and Assessment.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Establish and engage a coalition of diverse stakeholders to develop, pilot, refine, and implement collaborative systems change models that support Iowans with disabilities.

Utilize the U.S. Department of Labor's recognized Direct Support Professional Registered Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs as a model to recruit, train, and retain interested Iowans with disabilities into CIE.

Increase ongoing delivery of services that begin in early high school and result in uninterrupted transition to CIE for youth with disabilities.

Facilitate an increase in Iowans with disabilities with obtaining and maintaining CIE that leads to economic security.

Increase expectation and demand for CIE for all Iowans with disabilities.

Align public policies, funding, and practices that support CIE as the first and preferred outcome for all Iowans with disabilities.

During the first six months of the grant, IBC work focused on establishing contracts with key implementation partners; developing the grant performance measures; updating the required work plan; commencing the GHA Employment Specialist mentoring program; presenting information about the grant at various trainings and conferences; and initiating the process of hiring staff. Meetings have also been held with Iowa Workforce Development and other partners to discuss the proposed pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs for Direct Support Professionals. Conversations were held regarding exploring the possibility of stackable credentials as it relates to the apprenticeship programs.

During the next six months of the grant (April 2023 - September 2023) efforts have focused on a variety of activities, including the hiring of team members. Two DIF Counselor Specialists, Paul Fuller and Ashley Banes, were recently hired with a start date of July 21, 2023 (see their information below!). Training these Specialists will be a major focus for the remainder of the federal fiscal year. Simultaneously, UCEDD held interviews for their two DIF Coordinator positions who will assist in the facilitation of the various workgroups within the Collective. The two selected individuals will start at the end of July, or in early August. Once onboard, Coordinators and Specialists will work collaboratively as a team.



Welcome Aboard Ashley Banes!!

Ashley has worked for Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services as a Counselor since 2021. She has been instrumental in ensuring the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program has been successful in her area office, and she is often asked to share her knowledge with others who are learning IPS. Simultaneously, she serves as an Adjunct Psychology Instructor at Southeastern Community College. Ashley has experience working within the Department of Corrections in various roles, including as a Parole Officer, Community Treatment Coordinator, Drug Court Officer, and Residential Officer.

Welcome, Ashley!

Welcome Aboard Paul Fuller!!

Paul has worked for Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services for ten years. Prior to his work with IVRS, he served as a Transition Employment Specialist with the Waterloo Transition Alliance Program (TAP). As a Counselor with IVRS, he has overseen two TAP programs and has vast experience in the field of transition-aged youth. This experience has allowed him to be an advocate for youth, including ensuring a focus on competitive integrated employment. He has coordinated transition summer programming for multiple years.

Welcome, Paul!



Also within this timeframe, the team has established monthly meetings with the pre-existing IPS leadership team. The meetings are utilized to ensure the existing IPS team and the DIF team are working in collaboration to further the efforts of IPS in the State of Iowa. This includes discussions on implementing IPS sites focused on youth in the upcoming years of the grant. The IPS leadership team held a DIF IPS Call to Participate Information Session on June 27, 2023. This was an opportunity to provide details and answer questions for interested providers. Of the applications received, five agencies have been selected to participate in the Year 1 DIF IPS pilot project. Congratulations to these agencies!

Efforts are also underway to establish a Steering Committee (leadership team) and Collective (a large group of individuals with disabilities, parents, agency representatives, and other stakeholders designed to move efforts forward). These individuals and entities will be instrumental in ensuring systemic change in the State of Iowa occurs. Communication has been sent out inviting stakeholders to identify times that work best to attend the first kickoff meeting and establish work groups focused on the various objectives within the grant. UCEDD is looking at increasing the invitation list so additions and recommendations are welcome!

The Iowa Blueprint for Change team is focused on working with Griffin-Hammis Associates to develop an Everyone Can Work curriculum. This three-part curriculum will begin with Person-Centered Thinking sessions designed to create a foundation for embedding Person-Centered Thinking into the values, vision, policies, and practices of agencies with a focus on employment. The second portion of the curriculum focuses on an asynchronous four-module training series. The series builds on the Person-Centered Thinking and values and identifies specific strategies that lead to more sustainable and financially rewarding employment outcomes for people with disabilities. It also explores how all professionals can actively support the belief that all individuals can work. It starts to delineate the roles, responsibilities and best practices for each key entity.

The third portion of the curriculum is a one-day Summit designed to debrief and discuss what was learned. The Summit will also be an opportunity to start developing specific action plans to support increased employment access and opportunities.

Congratulations to the Year 1 IPS Pilots!

- 43 North Iowa
- First Resources Corp
- Hope Haven Area Development
- Hope Haven Rock Valley
- VODEC

Congratulations to the Year 1 CD Pilots!

- 43 North Iowa
- Arc of ECI
- Candeo
- Hope Haven Area Development
- ITP
- MVP
- WCDC

**The contents of this newsletter were developed under grant number H421D220013 from the Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. (Authority 20 U.S.C. §§ 1221e-3 and 3474)*

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services & DIF SWTCIE Providers

