

**Washington State – Putting Employment First  
Travel to the State of Washington, U.S.A., to learn how the  
State has achieved a high increase of people with a disability  
participating in the workforce**

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“The way of thinking about employment for people with developmental disabilities can be summarized in this way:

- From the impossible to the possible...
- From possible to beneficial...
- From beneficial to allowed...
- From allowed to preferred...
- From preferred to expected ...
- From expected to required...

...to the same standard as everyone else.”

(D. Mank, 2008, p. 3)

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

My reasons for choosing to investigate employment of people with a disability as a topic is based on my own experience. The organisation that I head, Coromandel Independent Living Trust, employs 30 people; nine have a disability. Very few work full-time and for some its just three hours a week. But the effects have been wide-spread and hugely positive in our isolated rural community. I was recommended to look at Washington State, U.S.A., if I was interested in how to get people with a disability into work so I began to do some on-line research. It was soon evident that this was a good choice and many encouraging emails from stakeholders there confirmed it.

From the beginning I knew that it was virtually impossible for me to achieve the goal of travelling extensively for six weeks without support, due to my legal blindness. My appreciation goes to my wife Alison Carter, who took up much of the workload for the entire project.

Whilst much of our time was spent in King County and its major city, Seattle, we were able to have contact with many people from the other counties through the Community Summit in rural Wenatchee, site visits and County meetings. This gave me some context and was relevant in showing how different communities operated. Because the Counties were responsible for services, the theme of local solutions showed the benefits, and the challenges, for small more isolated areas. We very early on discovered that it is in the area of developmental disability that Washington State has had its greatest success in getting people into work; the Developmental Disability Administration is an exemplar looked to from all over the U.S. for its commitment and innovation. So we decided to focus on their work, although we took time to visit a vocational provider for

people with low vision and blindness and for people who had sustained a brain injury. These reports are included as appendices 8, 9 and 10.

Leadership was a major key to Washington's success. This was displayed in varied spheres: users, families, not for profit groups, business and government. It was reinforced by President Obama, who gave a clear mandate on employing people with a disability stressing the jobs should be at all levels of an organisation.

We discovered there was an emphasis on transition from school to work, with the Legislature (i.e. State Government politicians) providing funding specifically for youth leaving high schools in the State. Nearly all sheltered workshops had closed and there is a determination for disability enclaves to be phased out and a real energy to secure jobs for people with a disability in an ever-widening range of industries. The pattern of placement in large retail settings was viewed as an initial phase and that opportunities were now being sought in a myriad of settings. Adaptive technology has been utilised, often with a 'solution per user' approach. This is now complemented by smart-phone and tablet solutions that harness apps to serve the user and empower self-advocacy. In practice in the workplace, they can offer prompts, alert time signals that keep the person on task and inter communication within the workplace, not only with fellow workers but also with customers. (An example was a worker with a disability who could not speak and wore a badge that said, 'I can't speak but let me answer you on my iPad'.)

Employment agencies or vendors are an essential element of the mix. By collaboration between one another, job seekers and employees, they do much of the work, implementing the clear vision. Their approach was very much that it was the smart thing to do, as well as the right thing to do. The State Agencies, The Developmental Disability

Administration and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation enabled their efforts. With financial support, this was backed up by best practice, innovation and training opportunities provided by the NGO, Washington Initiative For Supported Employment (WISE). The advocacy organisation ARC of Washington had the role of lobbying the Legislature, among others, to ensure that State level support continued across both political parties. This has resulted in cross-party support.

It has been a radical move; Washington is the exemplar State for Employment First in the U.S. but even so it faces challenges. Among them is finding sufficient work hours for people so that they are less likely to require day services, another is ensuring that the work available to them has a vertical career pathway so they are not working only in entry level positions. An ongoing commitment required to ensure that they are earning a living wage depends on getting sufficient hours at, at least, the minimum wage.

But despite the challenges, the overwhelming impression I came back with was the sheer level of commitment to the belief that everyone can work, that not only do they deserve to work as a right, but that there is an expectation that they will work. The big challenge is to how you vertically integrate people with a disability into a company. More education and more opportunities, such as those offered through new technology, will be part of the answer as they have been for other disadvantaged groups. An attitude shift is evident in the wider community where accessibility is becoming the new norm.

Disability is being viewed as the last area of human rights that has not been adequately addressed and in Washington State leadership on this issue is demonstrated at the top and all the way through.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of our research project was to learn how the State of Washington, U.S.A. had achieved a high increase of people with a disability participating in the work force. Our focus was on younger people with a disability and included self-employment and work in social enterprises, seeing how these strategies can be applied in the New Zealand environment.

On first arrival in Washington (June 2014) we attended the Community Summit Conference in Wenatchee where organisations and individuals from throughout the States came together to discuss a wide range of innovative developments in the field of developmental disabilities. The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), Chelan-Douglas DD, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Community Businesses, Organisations and Counties hosted the conference. As Washington State is a mentor State with a 'Work First Policy' there was an emphasis on speakers who were experienced in the many skills needed to prepare and help a developmentally disabled person work and have a meaningful life. These included presentations on cutting edge assistive technology, building social skills, peer mentoring programs for youth, employment and residential collaboration and enhancing the school to work transition.

We were invited by WISE to attend this conference in our first week and we immediately met some of the leading workers in the field. What we learned at the conference informed a great deal of our further investigation.

We discovered the greatest successes in employment for people with a disability had come in employment for those with developmental disability (a definition which includes intellectually disabled, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or other neurological or

other conditions which occurs before the individual attains the age of eighteen, or can be expected to continue indefinitely and which constitutes a substantial handicap to the individual).

The main thrust of the Developmental Disability Administration (DDA) was to get people with a disability in to mainstream employment with an emphasis on transitioning people from school to work. Many organisations had their own social enterprises, but even in these examples getting people into mainstream employment was still the driving aim.

As a result of the conference, we recognised that although social enterprise and self-employment were important elements in the mix, we saw Washington's success in attaining full integration for people with a developmental disability was the result of the drive to have people employed in the mainstream regardless of the level of their disability. As services for the developmentally disabled were more innovative and better resourced than other disability types it made sense for us in our limited time to focus on Washington's main areas of success. We had originally planned to visit several rural areas but on meeting a variety of organisations and people from these areas we were made aware that site visits were not the best use of our time and that the most useful examples would be found in King County and 7 adjoining counties. We had hoped to visit an indigenous community but the worst wildfires in the recorded history of Washington State at the time we had planned to visit, compelled us to remain in and around King County.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Washington becoming an ‘Employment First’ State**

Washington implemented its Working Age Adult Policy in 2006, the first ‘Employment First’ policy in the country.

In the 1950s, all state services were concentrated in institutions; parent-run ‘guilds’ were developing to provide services for children who lived in the community and were not accepted into public schools. Services ranged from serving infants to offering a variety of activities during daytime hours. During the 1960s, when de-institutionalisation began, funds were appropriated to contract for day services through the Counties.

Day programmes in the 1960s initially included sheltered workshops and developmental centres. In 1971, Washington became the first state in the U.S. to introduce legislation giving all children the right to free public education. Also in the 1970s when precision training methods became available for teaching individuals with disabilities to perform complex tasks, employment at real wages became an option. By the 1980s and 1990s individual employment became more and more possible, and more states began to focus on individual supported employment as a primary service option.

Today a range of legislation has enabled those with developmental disability to waive their rights to live in institutions and has shifted the released funding into services in the community, which includes supported employment. These are administered under a series of Waivers (see Appendix 1).

In 2012, Employment First, Senate Bill 6384, reinforced Washington’s ‘Employment First’ policy for people with developmental disabilities. It stipulates the following:

- directs the State to work with counties and stakeholders to strengthen and expand



- existing community access programmes that integrate people with a disability into their communities, as well as support independent living and skills; and
- requires that individuals 21 years of age and older be enrolled in supported employment for nine months, at which point they would be offered the choice of transitioning to community access programs if they have not gained employment.

According to the *Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration Employment Data March 2014 Update*, employment programs in Washington help people with developmental disabilities earn over \$40 million in wages each year. For every dollar invested there is a return to the taxpayer of \$1.46.

The original decision by the Developmental Disability Administration to focus on employment came from an examination of the basic values that underpin the core of Washington State County Guidelines.

### **Washington State County Guidelines**

- power and choice – making our own choices and directing our own lives;
- relationships – having people in our lives whom we love and care about and who love and care about us;
- status/contribution – feeling good about ourselves and having others recognise us for what we contribute to others and our community;
- integration - being part of our community, through active involvement. This means doing things we enjoy as well as new and interesting things;
- competence – learning to do things on our own or be supported to do things for ourselves; and
- health and safety – feeling safe and secure and being healthy.

Linda Rolfe, retired Director of the DDA at the time of Washington becoming an ‘Employment First’ state, is widely recognised as being a driving force in the ‘Employment First’ philosophy. She says she feels the major motivation was the desire to see people with a developmental disability integrated into society:

“I put together a group of people and we looked at the sort of outcomes we wanted to achieve. We looked at these values, and how to put quality assurance and evaluation in place and we realized that employment achieves every single one of them. There were other ways to achieve this, but no one thing that could achieve them all in the way employment could. Plus employment is very cost effective. If people have good jobs they use fewer services, they pay taxes; they stay healthier. What we wanted was for people to be included. It came out of that. It's much easier

to get people included through employment...

The assumption that people couldn't work was the most serious barrier we had to overcome. So we had to think how do we have an impact on what the expectations are for people with disabilities. And once you change what the expectation is for people with a disability, once you have a common agreement about what that expectation is, the system will change to support that expectation. It won't change person by person" (L. Rolfe personal communication, 10 July 2014).

**DSHS/DDA stands for the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Developmental Disabilities Administration.**

The **DSHS/DDA** is responsible for determining eligibility and authorising paid services. The DSHS/DDA currently provides the following services and programs: case management, Medicaid personal care, residential services, residential habilitation centres, family support, dental, voluntary placement foster care programme, and the medically intensive programme. The DSHS/DDA administers services on a regional basis. Region 2 is the DSHS/DDA office that serves King County. DDA administers programmes and services for people who have the conditions of an intellectual disability, epilepsy, autism, cerebral palsy or other neurological conditions similar to an intellectual disability.

**DDD stands for the Developmental Disabilities Division and usually we, in our report, have dealt with the KCDDD – the King County Developmental Disabilities Division.**

The **King County Developmental Disabilities Division (KCDDD)** is responsible for providing employment and day programme services. The KCDDD currently provides the following services: birth-to-three, employment, community access, housing, in-home family counseling, social and recreational activities, information and assistance, advocacy, homelessness projects, and programme development/technical assistance.

**DVR, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, is also a division within the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.**

The **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** helps adults with all types of disabilities find and secure stable employment. DVR services are not long-term. Their purpose is to provide the necessary tools and assistance for initial job placement and (if needed) to aid transition to long-term supports outside DVR (such as DDA).

Figure 1. Definitions

## **THE STEPS TO EMPLOYMENT – UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM**

According to the *King County 2010 to 2013 Plan for Developmental Disability*, the Department of Developmental Disability (DDD) provides services to support people into work and to keep them there once they are employed. Funding is provided to each county's Department of Developmental Disability and they contract out to employment vendors.

The employment supports for adults ages 21 to 61 covers:

### **Pre-Vocational Services**

Services occur in a segregated setting (workshops) and are designed to prepare the individual for gainful employment in an integrated setting through training and skill development. Washington State has committed to a 4-year transition plan to close all segregated workshops by March 2019 and move individuals into individual employment or community access services.

### **Group Supported Employment**

This is seen as a step on an individual's pathway toward gainful employment in an integrated setting and includes:

- activities outlined in individual supported employment services;
- daily intense supervision by a qualified employment provider; and
- groupings of no more than eight workers with disabilities.

Individuals demonstrate an ongoing need for supervision and support to maintain employment.

### **Individual Supported Employment**

This includes job coaching and other services needed to sustain minimum wage pay or

higher in a community setting. Typically clients in this category need less support over time. These services are conducted in integrated business environments and include:

- creation of work opportunities through job development;
- on-the-job training;
- training for the supervisor and/or peer workers to enable them to serve as natural supports on the job;
- modification of work site tasks;
- employment retention and follow along support; and
- development of career and promotional opportunities.

### **Benefits Analysis**

The King County DDD Employment Resource Co-ordinator provides this service which includes analysis of an individual's government benefits to identify impacts related to the decision to work and identification of options for funding employment supports such as social security work incentives which encourage individuals with disabilities to work.

Some work incentives help individuals to work without losing all of their benefits. Other work incentives actually help individuals afford some of the costs related to being successfully employed. The Employment Resource Coordinator can review a person's situation during a benefit consultation and help determine what appropriate work incentives can be used.

### **School to Work Transition – How it works**

Most of the vendors involved in school to work transition we spoke to were in King County, Washington (which includes the city of Seattle). As in other areas, the DDD funds the counties who contract with employment vendors. According to the *2010-2013*

*Plan for Developmental Disabilities*, the S2W (school to work) assists transition students who are aged 20 in their last year of school and enrolled in DDA to leave school with a job and supports to make a seamless transition to adult life. A King County DDD employment resources co-ordinator organises employment supports for transition students through an interagency team that includes the student, their parents, school district Individual Employment Plan (IEP) staff, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counsellors, DDA case resource manager and an employment vendor. The King County DDD staff are involved with intake orientation, planning and conducting annual transition fairs, assisting families with social security benefits and managing contracts with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and employment vendors.

There are three program models used in S2W:

1) The S2W Student Chooses Employment Vendor

The King County DDD pays employment vendors to provide employment support for a student as early as July of the year prior to their planned exit from school, the following June. Schools have a Memorandum of Agreement with King Country DDD stating that they will contribute time and staff resources to participate in and support the process of helping a student find and maintain employment while they are in their last year of school. However schools do not financially contribute to the cost of outside employment services. Students stay enrolled in school and the district manages their Individual Employment Plan. The Department of Vocational Research pays King County DDD an outcome payment for a successful 90-day employment outcome for the student. The King County DDD passes on a portion of the outcome payment to the employment vendor and recovers a portion of its costs.

## 2) School Chooses One Vendor for all S2W Students

School Districts contract with King County DDD to provide an employment consultant from a supported employment agency to be embedded in their transition program, working with all S2W students who are preparing to exit school in their 21st year.

## 3) Highline Community College Achieve Program

Highline Community College houses a supported employment agency that offers a transition program on the community college campus. They accept referrals from various school districts that pay for their S2W students to attend. Students stay enrolled in their home school district and the district pays for the educational fees, King County DDD pays for the assessment process, and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation pays for placement and training. Students take vocational preparation classes taught by Highline Community College instructors and participate in community-based work experiences with the intent of finding a job before they leave in June. They also have the opportunity to take advantage of campus resources and participate in campus activities.<sup>1</sup>

## **Transition Resource Fairs**

Rod Duncan from DDA gave me some useful information about Transition Resource Fairs:

“Each County sponsors and funds one transition fair per year, usually in March. King County sponsors two due to the size of the county. The numbers the fairs attract depend on the size of the County. King County had almost 1000 participants in one session and about 350 in their second session. Invitations for the

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<sup>1</sup> Further information of School to Work Transition can be found in “Preparing for Transition from School to Supported Employment” ([dept.washington.edu/dbpeds/transitiontoemployment.htm](http://dept.washington.edu/dbpeds/transitiontoemployment.htm))

transition fairs go to individuals aged 14-22. Students and their families will meet employment vendors, County and Agency staff, college and technical college staff, community and housing organizations, amongst many others. Participants also have the opportunity to attend workshops to learn about the resources that are available to help them transition from school to the workforce” (R. Duncan, personal communication, 24 April 2015).



## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DVR AND DDA – HOW IT WORKS**

While the Developmental Disabilities Administration historically has taken a leadership role on behalf of its clients, the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (a state- and federally-sponsored programme with the goal of getting people with a disability into work) has been a partner from early on. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has a co-operative funding arrangement with DDA through the counties which features DVR's shorter-term investment in evaluation, job placement and training and DDA's commitment to long-term support.

The first step in finding work in Washington State comes through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation who provides the funding necessary to get a client into work. If the person has a developmental disability the DDA joins in once they have work and provides the funding to give them the support needed to stay in work.

DVR counsellors work with the individual and their support systems (i.e. family and/or guardian if applicable) to develop an individualized rehabilitation plan of services to prepare a client for work and the client is then passed on to one of the employment vendors in the State who will go out and find them employment. DVR funds the job placement and initial job coaching at the job site, as well as any other support services that may be needed such as clothing, transportation or assistive technology. After the client begins working, DVR continues to follow the individual for 90-days after the transition to long-term supports being funded by DDA. In most cases 90 days is usually enough to ensure that the client is successful but it can be left open if the person is still having difficulties related to their disability. DVR's position is to never limit opportunities. The only criteria to be eligible for DVR services are that the person must be diagnosed as having a disability, and that the disability presents barriers to

employment that make it difficult for the person to secure or maintain employment.

DVR does not have a cap on spending on each individual, as James O'Brien, DVR Interim Area 2 Manager, DSHS, Lynnwood, Washington explains, nor can DVR deny an application for services as both are guaranteed under The Rehabilitation Act. DVR services are individualised to address the customer's unique barriers to employment.

“DVR can pay for limited medical or mental health restoration services, tools, clothing, child care, medication for the consumer, dental services, getting a car fixed, anything needed to start to do the job. The exclusions are insurance, legal fees, fines, and usual living expenses such as food and utilities. If people need help with basic life skills training, DVR can pay for an Independent Living Provider to come in and assess and train the client. However, the DVR counselor has to determine that DVR services will enable the client to become employed, and that what is being asked for is what is needed, not just what is wanted. If they believe someone isn't job ready they look at things like trial work experience and a community placement job trial, which includes volunteering in the community. This may also happen with a person with behavioral problems to ascertain whether they only have them in the job or whether the same behavioral problems happen in other settings” (J. O'Brien, personal communication, 3 July 2014).

Once someone is job ready, the person is passed on to the employment vendor/provider (referred to by DVR as a Community Rehabilitation Program or 'CRP'). DVR pays a flat outcome fee to the employment provider when they achieve the placement outcome. Under the current DVR/CRP contract, the placement fees range between \$1,225 and \$3,675 depending on the level of service needed. Similar outcome fees are paid when job

retention (i.e. job coaching) is then needed. They monitor outcomes and contracts at a State level so that services are consistent and that the tenets of The Rehabilitation Act are evenly applied so that even in small regional areas they must work on an informed choice model in the choice of employment provider.

Once the customer is work ready then an agreement is signed between DVR, the customer and the employment provider, stating the type of work and the hours the customer wants. DVR shares Data with Social Security work ticket, DDA and Employment Security.

## WASHINGTON STATE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYMENT DATA

As the Development Disabilities Administration distributes the money to the Developmental Disabilities Division in each county, we visited DDA County Services Manager Branda Matson in the State capital, Olympia, to get an overview of the success of ‘Employment First’. She supplied us with an *Employment Outcomes Monitoring Report* (Developmental Disabilities Administration, 2014); page two of this report is Figure 2 and the whole document is Appendix 2. The economic benefits are immediately obvious.

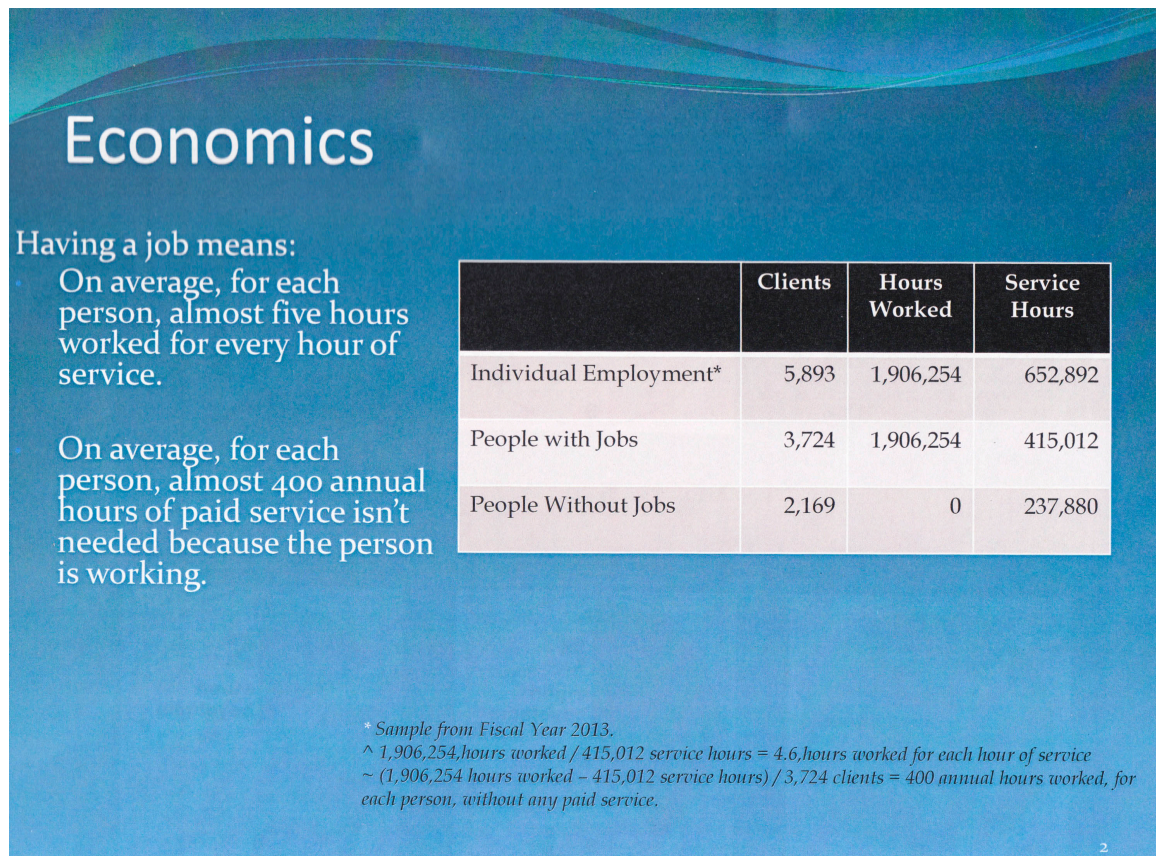


Figure 2. *The Economics of ‘Employment First’*

Further figures show other benefits:

- Of the 7, 216 of Working Age people (21 -62) in Washington State registered for

DDA services, 5,325 were in individual employment, 977 were in group supported employment, 342 were in pre-vocational employments (usually workshops) and 570 were in community access.

- This means that 64 per cent of DDA clients were employed and earning a wage. The average hourly wage in 2013 was \$9.55.
- The percentage of DDA clients employed with greater than 20 hours of work per week was 18% in 2013, which had fallen from 23 percent in 2010. However Branda Matson attributes this to the fact that as more success has been attained in getting DDA clients into work they have taken on more high acuity clients (higher needs) who have been unable to sustain longer periods of work. She believes that for higher acuity clients the nine-month period for higher acuity clients to find work is insufficient and quotes data from the University of Massachusetts that suggests 15 months is a better fit.
- 78 per cent of DDA clients transitioning from school in 2013 into individual supported were in work (with an average of 7 hours a week).

Branda Matson feels that although the employment success of DDA is looked to by other areas of disability, there is still room for improvement.

“As jobs evolve, and there are less of the traditional areas of employment for the disabled, there is more technical assistance required. There are untapped areas for fuller technology use, areas like people-centered plans, using visual media, i-Pads and video to communicate and learn work methods with. There can be more utilization of technology in helping people navigate through their choices” (B. Matson, personal communication, 30 June 2014).

Branda believed that one of the big conversations DDA has to have with vendors is around increasing hours, while at the same time not giving up on high acuity clients and finding community access for them an easier option than work. “If work is not found and clients move into community access, at their annual assessment we need to revisit the prospects of work” (B. Matson, personal communication, 30 June 2014).

Overall Matson feels the relationships between the county administration and the vendors is good and says they depend on the integrity of the vendors and believe they do the best they can for their clients. Vendors are monitored in accordance to the County Guidelines.<sup>2</sup>

The wide range of work done by Employment Vendors that can be billed to DVR and DDD can be seen in Appendix 6.

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<sup>2</sup> The providers of employment services are monitored by the organization CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) an independent organization with a focus on ensuring that services to individuals with disabilities are of a high quality. Both DVR and the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDA) both require that agencies that provide vocational services to their clients are CARF accredited. After an organization applies for accreditation, CARF sends professionals in the field to conduct an on-site review. This review includes not only the process and policy pieces, but the surveyors also meet with the organisation’s stakeholders to confirm their satisfaction with services and outcomes. Surveyors meet with staff members and offer suggestions for improving the quality of services.

## **THE EMPLOYMENT VENDORS**

They range from large to small, operating in just one county to state-wide, have a real sense of what works locally and with different people. Employment vendors today work in a supportive backdrop that has taken many years, legislation and attitude change to achieve. In July 2013, the Washington State Governor announced that he wanted to achieve one thousand more jobs for people with a disability in the next year. The State Government aims that 7% of its workforce will comprise of people with a disability. The Federal Government asks that their workforce, and the workforce of companies with more than 50 employees that hold Federal Government contracts, should constitute 12% of employees with a disability throughout the organisation. The city of Seattle is a good example of a public body that came on board early. In a much-lauded first, Microsoft has announced that over 2014-2015 it aims to provide 200 jobs for the developmentally disabled at its main campus, implemented by the management company, CBRE.

The State has funded a strong parent coalition that has a long history starting after World War II in fighting for the rights of the developmentally disabled. The ARC of Washington State has branches in each of the 39 counties. It offers education for parents and is a strong lobby group, encouraging its members in public speaking, tips on writing to the Legislature, holding lunches and other events where those aspiring to office must address where they stand on disability issues, knowing they will be held to their promises. They coach their members in strategic thinking and presenting issues. The ARC are strongly behind employment and help educate parents around how the system works, the waivers, their social security and any fears they may have such as their child's safety, losing social security payments and health insurance. Their message to parents is, 'You are the experts.'

A crucial part of the vendors' success is the networks that surround them, particularly in a time of rapid change. Washington State funds the availability of on-going training and technical assistance through the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE). WISE serves all counties in Washington and as well as technical assistance provides training, consulting, resource development, best practice demonstrations, data collection and dissemination to and for county and state government agencies and non-profit providers of service, professional association, schools, employers consumers of service and their families, advocacy organisations, faith communities and the community. The list of work WISE does is impressive, it provides individual training, technical assistance for individuals' person-centred plans and for organisations. It holds webinars for training as well as running a live inclusive website where people can share their stories. It has an expert who can help an individual maximise his or her hand held devices, i-Pads, i-Phones etc., in ways to give them fuller communication. WISE has set up i-Pad learning cohorts where it brings together employment professionals to learnt the basics of the equipment as well as the features, generic and especially developed apps which help the job seeker with a disability prepare for work, market themselves, learn new tasks, stay on schedule, reduce anxiety, and communicate with co-workers and customers.

## **Housing**

There are many areas that employment vendors cannot control but which need to be working well for a person with a disability to succeed in the workforce. Housing is one of these areas. Since the closure of residential institutions people with a disability may live with their families, share a flat or be housed in Section 8 housing, (a housing



programme that helps low income, elderly and disabled tenants afford decent and safe housing outside the public housing system). Residential support workers will help the client in their home and play a key part in making sure the client is successful in the workplace. They see they're dressed well, and are in the right frame of mind when they leave for the day. So a good relationship between the employment vendor and the residential support staff is essential to ensure a person's success.

### **Public Transport**

Accessible transport for people with a disability has been hard fought for in Seattle with several major court cases over the years against the Transit authority. Today people with a disability can access public transport that even provides for the driver to vacate their seat and fasten a person's wheel chair into place. All buses have extendable lifts that wheelchairs can roll on to. There are both visual and audible cues to announce bus stops. There is moveable seating that provides for personal mobility devices. The transit authority provided one on one coaching on access to the system, will travel with people on their routes until they are confident; this even includes a shepherd service whilst people become oriented to the system, i.e. a transit car following a bus to ensure the customer can alight at the correct stop. Transit provide a door-to-door access service that will take people with a disability to and from their work.

All of the above have helped lead to a recognition in Washington State that people with a disability can work. As Karen Williams, from employment vendor Trillium, put it, "Disabled people are becoming a powerful consumer group and businesses are starting to see that hiring a person with a disability might give them a competitive edge" (K. Williams, personal communication, 8 July 2014).

As Chris Brandt, director of AtWork!, a larger employment vendor that made the move from an old sheltered workshop model into integrated employment, puts it:

“The timing's right. We have seen the main-streaming of developmentally disabled people in school, people getting jobs in the community, disabled people being actors and actresses on TV, more lobbying and participating in voting, disabled people in public office. And when you get to work alongside people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities you begin to develop a different attitude and expectation of what they can do and who they are. Washington State becoming an ‘Employment First’ State also made a big difference” (C. Brandt, personal communication, 8 July 2014).

“It is a business service not a social service.”

(L. Rolfe, personal communication, 10 July 2014)

There are more than 200 employment vendors in Washington. DDA’s success depends on the integrity of the employment vendors and their ability to be innovative. As can be seen on Appendix 4, the employment specialists go far beyond finding work and job coaching.

But the idea of it being about both the person with a disability and the employer is a large part of it working. As well as state institutions and large well-established businesses, many of the firms that hire employees with a disability are small businesses. We visited a range of vendors, three of which had closed sheltered workshops. The places we looked at were Northwest Center, Vadis, AtWork!, Provail, Trillium and the new

Microsoft project which has engendered a great deal of excitement. We also attended the DDD counties meeting, visited the Lighthouse for the Blind and talked to employment specialists in the field of acquired brain injury. All of the interviews with and information about the above are contained in the appendices at the end of this report. We talked to employment specialists on the ground, CEOs of the organisations, families and clients. We also visited clients in the workplace and watched an employment specialist shadow a client through their working day and examine a few problems around their working day. We attended a workshop on LEAN Training, the systemised training method favoured by most of the organisations we visited. More of this is in Appendix 6.

Many of the employment specialists repeated themes in both their successes and concerns. Amongst these were:

- having a board and staff that really believe anyone can work;
- working for the employer as well as the employee (it is important that the employer had a good experience because they will then take people with a disability on in the future and will tell other employers about their positive experience);
- concentrate on small as well as big businesses (small businesses are easier to build personal relationships with);
- close collaboration with families (many of the people vendors serve are under 40 and live with their families; help them by discussing fears they may have around medical insurance or social security benefits);
- make sure the supports are around the person;
- work to eliminate any stresses and build collaboration between residential support

and the employment specialists;

- creating safe workplaces where clients can advocate for themselves;
- have a working interview, where clients show what they can do and employment consultants can identify with any issues;
- focus on a strength-based approach discovering people's unique strengths and gifts;
- follow the customised employment model where everyone has a discovery model focusing on what they do best;
- use technology to create a visual portfolio that clients with challenges in communication can take with them;
- use internships, work experience and volunteering to give clients valid experience and a reference. Whilst remembering that:

“Volunteering should be an on ramp, not a parking lot.”

(C. Christian Vadis, personal communication, 16 July 2014)

- give clients confidence by breaking down all the tasks they are doing so they are aware of how much they do;
- make sure all barriers in the workplace are overcome and changes to accommodate the client are made (federal law states that a reasonable accommodation must be made, but what is reasonable will depend on the position of the employer, the size of the organisation etc.);
- ensure that the client is properly trained to do the job; this is especially vital in a ‘carved’ job and make sure both the employer and the employee are aware of each

- others expectations;
- be innovative, think outside the box and be open to move into new industries rather than staying with the traditional areas that employ people with a disability;
  - be prepared to collaborate if you have a client whom you think another employment vendor could better place; and
  - keep good data.

“From a business perspective I would say that investment is relatively low  
but the return is extremely high.”

M. Sjolund, Manager, Bellevue Dunn Lumber (2010).

Vadis, Provail and AtWork! all closed sheltered workshops and their success in doing so was partly due to the fact that they agreed amongst themselves once the decision was made that they would not accept clients from each other. Provail and AtWork! both operate social enterprises as does Northwest Center.

## **SELF-EMPLOYMENT**

It was our intention to look at examples of self-employment for people with a disability; however only a tiny percentage of people with a disability were self-employed. We attended a day of workshops held by the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council Community Supports and Services Group which focused on how self-employment could work and be supported while at the same time meeting the requirements for support from DVR and DDA. The Washington State Division of Developmental Disabilities Self Employment Guidelines were outlined. Broadly speaking, the path to self-employment follows closely on the principles used for other supported employment. Again the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation is the first resource. The proposed business must be feasible and potentially profitable and meet Internal Revenue Services requirements of being a business and not a hobby. If the proposal meets the DVR requirements they will provide resources, equipment supplies etc., that are non-monetary to aid the business get started. The DDD Case Resource Manager, in collaboration with counties, will determine whether the person's proposed self-employment pathway is appropriate and adheres to the Working Age Adult Policy. The vendors, as is the case in supported employment, will assist the person with training, developing independence and finding other resources and natural supports for tasks involved in supporting the business. Concerns were raised about the possibility of family members conducting the business without the involvement of the person with a disability but it was decided it was a risk that had to be managed. See Appendix 5.

## CONCLUSION

The key question of our project was, ‘How has Washington State been successful in getting people with a disability into the workforce?’ We wanted to look at what was needed both legislatively and at a local level and how the system worked. We visited a wide range of employment vendors and observed their work in practice and interviewed them on their successes and challenges. We talked to parents in the parents’ coalition and to clients themselves.

We focused on people with a developmental disability where Washington State has the most notable success and other areas of disability (e.g. mental health), look to the Developmental Disability Administration as a model. Washington is a mentor State to other States on Working Age Employment Policy.

Our key findings and conclusion are:

There is a commitment and vision from the top. Coming from there is the following:

- a combination of legislation and mandate;
- directive that jobs are at all levels – not just entry level (a percentage of employees with a disability suggested for State and Federal government and publicly funded institutions as well as private corporations holding Federal contracts);
- employment of people with a disability increasingly recognised as a positive employment strategy resulting in commercial gain;
- people with a disability becoming a vocal consumer group;
- a requirement that medium and larger employers must carry out work to accommodate the employees with a disability’s requirements to be able to carry

out their work;

- culture recognising employers' commitment in a wide range of celebratory events, awards, dinners, etc.;
- government funding of advocacy, especially parent groups;
- extensive provision of best practice training, use of technology by vendors, employers and clients;
- emphasis on data capture and tracking that is gathered by the staff;
- responsibility at county level – wide variety of vendors with local knowledge focusing on local solutions;
- emphasis on innovation throughout the sector;
- expectation from all stakeholders that everyone can work;
- systemised training used (often the LEAN system) which ensures that clients have clarity about processes and time lines in their work;
- separation of Social Security Administration and Dept. of Vocational Rehabilitation gives confidence;
- DVR required to provide what is needed for a person to work (this can be something like a car, a computer, with the exception being insurance etc.);
- transition from Social Security to work managed carefully for the best outcome for the client; and
- culture of friendly competition and collaboration between employment vendors.

Some of the challenges are:

- retention of staff (many of the employment vendors are young having come in at entry level);



- getting sufficient hours for clients to have a living wage;
- making sure that natural supports, family, friends share the employment vision; and
- making sure that housing and transport are in place for the client.

Overall what I saw in Washington was a belief that given the right support people with developmental disabilities, even with high needs, can work. It's a belief that has spread from families and employment vendors, to State legislators and to employers themselves.

The image of someone with a disability on benefit and with little potential to work is possibly still the image held in New Zealand. Being developmentally disabled too often means poverty and with no possibility for the sort of integration in mainstream that work gives us. The negative effects of not working on a person's health are well documented. In Washington we saw not just an emphasis on the right to work, but an expectation that people would work in a way that provided a living wage.

But for the Washington philosophy to work it needs a huge commitment, from the top down and from the bottom up. Government would need to commit the needed resources, undertake the necessary legislation, and see the right infrastructure in place. It would need to respond to different geographical and cultural dynamics by having a wide range of employment specialists with local solutions. It must view work for people with a disability as a desirable and productive outcome. It poses the question whether Work and Income should reside in one entity. It was reiterated throughout our trip that having vocational rehabilitation separate from the social security gave people confidence that they would not be disadvantaged by taking the leap to try work. It would need to tackle issues like housing and transport and positively encourage self-advocacy for clients and

parent groups. To adopt the Washington experience in a piecemeal way without all the pieces of the jigsaw being in place could result in effects that could be punitive to those who are already vulnerable.

Since our return we have spoken at a SPAN Trust meeting in the Waikato and will be speaking at the 'Our Places' conference held in Wellington in June 2015. We will make our experience available to the Ministry of Social Development and other government agencies, and will use aspects of our reports in a series of workshops to increase disability awareness in Hauraki being held later this year by the Coromandel Independent Living Trust.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

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### Appendix 2

Developmental Disabilities Administration. (2014). *Washington State Employment Data – March 2014 update*. Washington, U.S.A.

### Appendix 3

Developmental Disabilities Administration. (2014). *Employment outcomes monitoring report, yearly cohorts of individuals turning 21*. Washington, U.S.A.

### Appendix 4

Developmental Disabilities Administration. (2011). *Understanding Pathways to Employment Services Activities and Outcomes*. Washington, U.S.A. Retrieved from, <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/DDA/dda/documents/CO%20-%20Employment%20Phases%20and%20Billable%20Activities.pdf>

### Appendix 5

Developmental Disabilities Administration. (2014, July). *Self-employment services*. Paper presented at the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council Supports and Services Work Group, Washington, U.S.A.

### Appendix 6

Vendors – additional information

### Appendix 7

Travel Diary

### Appendix 8

Traumatic Brain Injury

### Appendix 9

The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)

### Appendix 10

Visual Disabilities