

Position Paper of The Arc of Pennsylvania with Respect to Employment for People with  
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities  
*Adopted June 25, 2011*

**ISSUE**

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have historically had difficulty getting and maintaining jobs in the community. As a result, they tend to live below the poverty level and are dependent on government programs to survive. The lack of employment opportunities and support adversely impacts their ability to live lives of their own choosing in the community. The service system's payment and policy emphasis on congregate care alternatives to employment needs to change in order for people to take advantage of what community-integrated employment has to offer. The employment challenge is also a community challenge with the private sector having a role in maintaining the status quo and keeping people caught in congregate care programs. Only when the system and society both take responsibility for the conditions we have, as well as for finding the solutions needed, will the change we want to see in employment happen in an everyday way.

Through meaningful community-integrated employment, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities will not only increase their financial security, they will also experience the benefits of increased self-worth and of becoming respected members of their communities. They will take their rightful place with respect to their careers and status as adults in the community. They will pave the way for others.

**POSITION**

The Arc of PA supports systemic change in publicly funded programs to reflect an "Employment First" approach. This means that community-integrated employment should be considered and pursued first for a person with an intellectual or developmental disability before any other day activity is considered, including a workshop placement or any other program that is segregated and exclusively or mostly serving only people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Policy, practices and programs need to be accountable to employment and other community integration outcomes. While all parties, including the community and employers, share in the responsibility to improve employment opportunities for people with disability, service systems and the programs they fund have a major role to play.

The system must ensure that meaningful career-oriented employment is offered, supported, and adequately funded before other services are considered; and on an ongoing and continuous basis when necessary. The Arc of PA acknowledges its responsibility as an advocacy agency in promoting employment and ensuring accountability relative to employment outcomes within the service system and the community as a whole.

While most community and service systems are nowhere close to achieving desired outcomes, Employment First practices require:

1. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to choose their career path and pursue employment to the best of their ability
2. Control and direction from individuals, families, employers and other community resources that most affect successful employment outcomes
3. Career orientation for families, teachers, and employers, as well as people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
4. Full inclusion at the job setting
5. Success in terms of pay and benefits commensurate with their colleagues without disabilities, and the ability to use employment income to support their everyday lives.
6. Long-term support for individuals and employers to the extent they need it, recognizing the responsibility of systems to fade away when they can and community resources are able to provide ongoing support as needed.
7. Total quality management to measure employment outcomes and to assist individuals, agencies, and families in continuously improving these outcomes.
8. Technology and assistive technology that assists people in performing employment related functions, assignments, responsibilities and tasks.
9. Person-centered planning and support that delivers in promoting employment outcomes through continuously improving job opportunities, up to date employment information for individuals, families, and employers; and adequate employment resources to achieve employment success.
10. ODP to take steps to review and reform, if necessary, its policies and what is funded in order to pursue reforms suggested by this paper.

The Arc of PA encourages and accepts responsibility, as Chapters and membership, to:

1. Develop an Employment First approach to its advocacy and, if a provider chapter, lead by example by developing an Employment First approach to its services and supports in order to promote community-integrated employment opportunities and outcomes;
2. Assist constituents in accessing meaningful employment resources in their communities, in and outside the system
3. Focus on employment for each person with a disability, regardless of severity, and build on each person's and employer's success.
4. Address Employment First challenges with employers, volunteer organizations, system leaders, and other community resources through education.
5. Support development of micro-enterprises, paid internships, volunteer opportunities that lead to jobs, seamless transitioning from school to a job or career oriented continuing education in young adult life, and community-focused career paths and job opportunity for young adults and others in vocational facilities, institutions and activity programs.