

Reshaping Indiana's Supports and Services for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

For years Indiana has set the bar for innovative approaches and supports to provide people with disabilities an opportunity for a life full of options and independence. What has always set Indiana apart from the rest is our commitment to our fundamental principles that should continue to guide us as we look to re-shape our system in the next few years.

People with disabilities are enjoying longer lifespans and the services and supports the state provides must be appropriate to help people no matter which phase of life they are in. We must focus on building a system that focuses on providing opportunities for the majority of people while still recognizing that differences in ability need to be recognized and adjustments made. We need to set high expectations for people and help them recognize that failing is a learning opportunity not the end. We need to stay true to our principle that all Hoosiers deserve the same opportunities, regardless of background, economic status, or physical and intellectual challenges.

A shift in our culture is needed to achieve the change we envision based on our principles and it begins with families and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The shift must take place over time to allow families to understand and embrace a new way of thinking, for providers to adjust and for the system to evolve. There must be a long-term vision coupled with ongoing short term strategies that move toward the guiding principles, but do not cause instability to a system already rocked by uncertainty. Too often the current system causes individuals and families to jump right through the natural supports that surround them and go straight to supports that are both intrusive and expensive.

Change will be viewed in different ways depending upon the life status of families and people with disabilities. Families with young children have very different goals than families in their 60's and beyond. Cultural change must address different phases of families' lives-- those with young children, children leaving high school, children in their 20's and 30's and families of adult children. In addition, respect and consideration must be given to the effects of poverty, unemployment and individual capabilities. Flexible approaches are necessary for families' socio-economic differences.

To achieve this transformational change it will be essential to optimize the benefit from every dollar spent. All funds saved must be reinvested into the system to allow for continued change. This policy should be an incentive for families, self advocates, providers and policy makers who will feel the impact of their investment multiplied. When new investment opportunities occur, decisions must be made strategically and follow a long-term plan with support by the state. If families, individuals with disabilities and providers embrace transformational change, there

must be a clear intention to use money wisely, maximize the benefits as far as possible, retain savings within the system, and support tremendous demands in new ways.

The following are four recommendations to start laying the foundation to a services and supports system that is based on our core principles of valuing people and providing them opportunities leading to a good life.

Recommendation: Create a system that supports and promotes self advocacy and independence which leads to a good life.

We must start talking with families early and share consistent information on natural and community supports. The LifeCourse and Communities of Practice should guide us in how those conversations are structured. A plan that begins at as an early age as possible and provides guidance to families in developing a vision for their loved one's future, and provides practical guidance in how that vision can be achieved – from a young age and continued through to adulthood. With a focus on self advocacy at an early age we can instill the need for advocacy through all stages of life, not just in adulthood. Furthermore, this vision-planning for families can provide background that leads to less guardianships and more conversations to alternatives to guardianship that provides for great independence.

Potential Action Items:

Create a service on the waiver that helps families and individuals identify natural supports.

Develop a process to connect people on Medicaid waiver waiting lists with local support groups and natural supports to help them take advantage of any and all existing community resources.

Develop a “first conversation” guide that helps professionals in sharing consistent information with families on natural and community supports.

Develop a peer support network that would allow self advocates to be hired as a community guide.

Add a technology component to the waiver supporting mobile devices to connect individuals to natural supports and allowing for social networking and personal use. Funding for training as well as acquisition of hardware and software should be included.

Provide stimulus funding to natural support organizations for developing apps to connect individuals with their organizations.

Recommendation: Create a system that invests in people with disabilities as early as possible knowing that early intervention services leads to less demand for services later through special education and Medicaid services.

In the first three years of a child's life, critical brain development takes place that will impact their life. Indiana's First Steps program provides critical early intervention services that serves as the foundation for developmental growth.

Potential Action Items

Invest state dollars in the First Steps Program to attract quality providers in the system.

Encourage the state to look into a children's waiver that supplements First Steps and services provided through the k-12 school system.

Review the current cost participation fee schedule to ensure that the system is adding efficiencies rather than draining the program of unseen resources.

Recommendation: Create an array of employment options for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to ensure informed choice that leads to a good life with independence and respect. The array of options should provide opportunities for people with all abilities to work in an environment that provides for growth, respect, preferences and interests.

Employment is a cornerstone of our life. Through work we feel value and respect. We are able to earn income that allows us to enjoy our hobbies and interests and working positively impacts our health and state of mind.

Potential Action Items:

Share a new vision, language and terminology that speak to the core philosophy of the principles we embrace so that we transition from words such as "sheltered workshop".

Create more school-to-work transition opportunities that foster individualized exploration of and experiences with community based employment options that enable youth to make informed choices.

Transition activities should include career assessments to identify students' interests and preferences, exposure to post-secondary education and career opportunities, training to develop job-seeking and workplace skills and participation in multiple on the job activities and experiences in paid and unpaid settings.

People with disabilities need job training not just in the specific area of job skills but the wrap around skills necessary to be successful in the workplace.

Employment supports and services should use best practices, including assessing skills and interests, working with employers, matching job skill sets and employer needs, providing individualized and ongoing job supports, designing reasonable job accommodation, integrating people in to the workforce, building social skills necessary in the workplace, and securing necessary ancillary services such as transportation.

Create an employment funding model based on outcomes rather than service hours.

Identify a productivity rate that is utilized to determine appropriateness of placement in a "sheltered workshop" program. An assessment of productivity should be conducted and if the individual is not able to perform at minimum rates, the individual should be directed to alternative programming options.

Remove ratio structure for pre-vocational services and replace with a reimbursement model that more effectively supports "graduation" from current prevocational programming. The current structure creates an environment in which participants and providers get comfortable with performance/skill attainment and progress slows or stops.

Informed choice needs to take place in employment regardless of the setting. If someone decides to go into a "sheltered workshop" setting that individual needs to be matched with a job that they can be successful in which means high productivity and a minimum wage. If they choose to work in a sub-minimum wage position, that position needs to be accepted in writing and clear annual outcomes need to be created and enforced.

Providers should be expected to progress people through programs and attain integrated employment.

Remove piece rate as an option. Replace with a tiered stipend approach that increases as productivity goes up.

Create training programs for employers throughout our state showing the positive outcomes associated with hiring people with disabilities and relieving them of stigmas.

Create a state action plan to move out of Order of Selection through Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Create opportunities for the State of Indiana to support hiring people with disabilities throughout state agencies as well as supporting the Ability Indiana program.

Recommendation: Create an array of living settings that support people with disabilities living in a setting of their choice that allows them to enjoy their interests, hobbies and preferred lifestyle.

Where people live is important and for people with disabilities it is no different. People should be able to choose not only where they live but who they live with. We realize that some people may need a more structured living arrangement that allows for more oversight of medical or behavioral needs, but that can still happen with respect and choice.

Potential action items:

Continue the moratorium on group homes.

Continue and find more ways to incentivize providers to transition their group homes to waiver homes.

Utilize technology more to help people live as independent as possible.

Ensure that people have the most access and opportunity to be seen as valuable members of the community in which they choose to live.

Promote a shared living model for those individuals who can no longer live with their own family but do not want to live alone.