

Editorial

In the current issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Niemiec, Lavin and Owens [10] have provided a very important Employment First position paper for APSE. This paper looks carefully at successful common principles that are evident in employment first integrated employment programs for persons with significant disabilities. As a statement from the APSE Board, this sends a very powerful message to the field that integrated employment is a highly desirable first choice that should be offered to every person with a significant disability. In fact this should not even be an issue: it is totally normal, it is totally typical and should be totally expected that all Americans with or without disabilities have a right to real work for real pay.

In 2003, we presented a paper titled *Competitive Employment: Is it the First Choice Yet?* [13]. Since then Rusch and Braddock [11], Mank [8], Brown et al. [3], Wehman et al. [12], and most recently Certo et al. [4] all are asking the same question: When will we offer all people with significant disabilities an informed choice of real work for real pay, individual jobs offered by businesses in the community where the paycheck transfers directly from the business to the worker with the disability? How many more studies need to be published by Bond et al. [1] on helping persons with psychiatric rehabilitation needs or with traumatic brain injury [13] or with developmental disabilities [7, 12] before the service delivery system embraces real work as the first choice? Griffin and Hammis [5] have laid out the blueprint for persons with significant disabilities to establish their own businesses and engage not only in real work but equity in their company. What more do we need to do to demonstrate the individual capacity of persons with significant disabilities?

The more recent data presented by Hall et al. in 2007 showed 10 high performing states, states that know how to increase their integrated employment outcomes. This is exciting to see such movement. Yet at the same time the most recent Braddock et al. [2] report shows a trailing off of supported employment outcomes and a steady increase in nonfacility community based day activities. This can probably be explained by Medicaid

Waiver funding policies in different states, but once again there are decisions being made for persons with significant disabilities not BY them but FOR them by service providers who are controlled by state and federal bureaucratic funding and eligibility policies.

Hence we come full circle to the Niemiec et al. paper in this issue. We need national organizations to take an extremely vocal and definitive stand with disability advocacy groups to say: “Enough is enough”. Segregated or large group placements must not be the first choice. Subminimum wage must not be a choice. Lack of true informed choice is not acceptable. Many of the people, if not most of the persons APSE represents, have minimal income, minimal influence and often limited capacity and voice to stand up by themselves in Congress to ask for competitive employment and self-employment and customized employment to be their first choice. It is up to us, as active professionals working arm in arm with families and persons with disabilities to say: We want real work for real pay.

The Niemiec, Lavin and Owens paper in this issue begins to move us further along in the right direction toward this goal. Future issues will examine the subminimum wage issue, workplace inclusion issues and strategies and ways to expand work opportunities for persons with disabilities with ethnic or minority origins.

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