

At the end of the day, what appears to be moving more and more disability service providers to embrace sustained organisational transformation is the recognition of the benefits and possibilities, that transformation brings to the people with disabilities each of these providers serve.

Provider Transformation

Work First™ Transformation
Program

Centre for Disability Employment Research
and Practice

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Index.

A Work First™ Approach to Provider Transformation	3
Why Change?	3
Setting the Tone for Change	4
Reviewing Present Operations and Culture	5
Identifying Your Values, Vision, and Mission	5
Making It Happen (Operations Focus)	5
How to begin: Start Small and Do It Right from the Start	5
Learning About and Investing in Best Practices	6
Incorporating Best Practices	6
Trying It Out - Piloting New Practices	7
What is a Pilot Project?	7
Why Pilot?	7
Who are Good Candidates with which to start a Pilot?	7
Does that mean that I should start with the people that appear to be easiest to get jobs?	8
Take the Time to Learn from your Pilot—revise your Initial Plans	8
Ensuring Sustainability	8
Think Big, Start Small, Scale Quickly	8
Chart out how you can effectively bring open integrated employment to scale	9
Where Do We Start?	9
The Process of Implementing Customised Employment in an Organisation	9
Contacts	11

A Work First™ Approach to Provider Transformation.

Organisational change requires a unique if not customised approach to each organisations' transformation goals. This is particularly important when supporting provider transformation on a national scale because:

- No two providers' transformation process and circumstances are the same, even if providers may operate in the same state or suburb;
- The nature of provider transformation has changed over time, both within particular states and nationally;
- Core best practices for successful provider transformation – practices that are considered “tried and true” among those who make this topic their life's work – can be implemented in many subtly different ways depending on a particular provider's circumstances and challenges;
- Effective mentoring relationships cannot be forced, and rely most heavily on building relationships with leaders and organisations who will “gel” in truly impactful ways;
- Communities of practice that bring together Subject Matter Experts and diverse providers on the path of organisational transformation can enhance learning, information exchange, mutual support structures and translation of knowledge.

Why Change?

For over thirty years since the Disability Services Act (1984), we have seen the emergence of a research and evidence base for competitive integrated employment services, thus enabling disability service providers to fill their toolboxes with a variety of innovative and “proven to work” strategies for facilitating open employment outcomes for individuals with various types of significant disabilities. In the last decade, research addressing the connection between open employment and positive health and mental health outcomes has increased, as has research demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of public investments in open employment.

With the advent of the Disability Employment Service (DES) system and now the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) there is an increased emphasis on integrated service provision and open employment services in particular, providers of more traditional employment and day services are no doubt feeling the pressure to participate in this evolution and bring their organisations and practices into full alignment with these developments that have come about in recent years.

Yet at the end of the day, what appears to be moving more and more traditional employment and day service provider organisations to embrace sustained organisational transformation is the recognition of the benefits and possibilities that transformation brings

to the people with disabilities each of these organisations serves. What's more, organisations embracing transformation are also finding that staff at all levels of the organisation are similarly positively affected, finding new energy, passion and satisfaction in doing new work that is changing their roles and their impact on the people with disabilities they support and their communities.

And finally, it seems clear that organisations engaged in transformation are recognising the positive benefits of this work on their reputation and standing in the wider community.

They are finding support is increasing from the local business community and their traditional community supporters. They are also finding significantly increased support from their funding sources that are equally invested in their success. And they are finding that peer organisations, both from within the state and from other states, are now looking to them for advice, mentoring and technical assistance. If these outcomes are the kinds of outcomes that resonate with you and your organisation, then transformation is the right next step.

Setting the Tone for Change

Change can be challenging in any organisation. Every community service provider has a history. Habits have been developed. Routines have been followed. Missions have been set and pursued. Staff and leadership have worked hard to accomplish goals. People have pride in the work they have done. The service provider has been considered a success.

Now new and exciting employment strategies are being introduced and adopted that are changing the way we view employment for people with disabilities. New options have opened for people with disabilities to be employed in open integrated jobs and recognised as full citizens of their communities. What an exciting time!

Not only has this changed the way we think but it also impacts the way services are provided. Change is not just coming, it's here. Great, visionary leadership is needed to shepherd providers into the future.

Times of change can be exciting and energising but they can also be unsettling and frightening for people served by the agency, families and guardians, boards of directors and staff. Effective leadership in the change process is essential to make the shift as smooth as possible. Leadership will set the tone for the change. The attitude of leaders will affect the receptivity of stakeholders to change in either a positive or negative manner. If the leadership presents the changes as burdensome, something the agency is being forced to do and generally undesirable, others will see it that way too. But if the leadership can project excitement and optimism about the possibilities, demonstrate a "can-do" approach,

encourage inclusiveness and determination, even when the future is not absolutely clear, positive change can and will occur, no matter what obstacles are encountered.

Finally, though it can be personally very difficult, it is important for provider leaders to do some self-reflection about their role in the transformation process. You have to ask yourself if this transformation is something in which you can truly invest all of the effort, energy, and creativity that will be necessary for it to be a success.

Transformation, though rewarding when you see the terrific results, is not easy and it does not happen quickly. And while you don't always have to be in the lead, because often other staff members will step up out of the ranks and drive the change, you do have to be able to embrace and support your service's transformation.

Reviewing Present Operations and Culture

An important step in the transformation process is conducting an in-depth assessment of the provider, its culture and beliefs, services and practices and positioning for transformation. You must know where you are to plan for where you are going. This assessment process should examine the provider's beliefs and culture, customers and services, operational structures and procedures, workforce and staff development, organisational structures and management practices, community image and marketing approach.

Identifying Your Values, Vision, and Mission

One of the most important activities to be undertaken in the transformation process is the review of your service's core identity and making a philosophical and programmatic commitment. This is done through examination of your philosophy, values, vision, and mission. These are your guiding principles throughout the transformation process and beyond. In transformation to open integrated employment, dependence on facilities is either greatly diminished or eliminated. Staff members need a virtual framework in which to operate. Philosophy, values, mission, and vision become the new "four walls" of your community-based service.

Making It Happen (Operations Focus)

How to begin: Start Small and Do It Right from the Start

Now that the strategic or transformation plan has been developed you can move to the implementation phase. The first thing to note is that transformation cannot be done all at

once. You should start small, ensuring that all of the foundations for transformation are well established and tested before you move forward.

Learning About and Investing in Best Practices

Incorporating Best Practices

You may feel under pressure to create open integrated employment and community integrated activities quickly. It is important to remember, however, that meaningful and long-lasting outcomes for people require thoughtful work, on an individualised basis. If you take the time to incorporate best practices that have a track record of bringing people into the workforce and into their communities, your work will result in outcomes that make a real difference in people's lives. This does not mean that you won't also create your own innovations and strategies especially suitable for your community and economy as you move along. However, there is no reason to re-invent the wheel. You can lose valuable time experimenting, when there are already best practices out there that can help you.

Invest some of your management staff's time in learning about current best practices. It's essential that those supervising direct service staff understand the best practices that direct service staff are trying to implement. These practices may include: customised employment strategies; the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of open employment; other proven job development strategies; person-centred planning processes; systematic instruction; job coaching and support strategies including positive behavioural supports, social stories, strategies for building natural supports, the use of technology and visual tools to fade supports in the workplace and in the community; and specific strategies for supporting people with particular needs (i.e., traumatic brain injury, substance abuse issues, autism, visual impairments, deafness, criminal justice system backgrounds). You will want to develop your own list of possible resources and research what these resources can offer your team.

As a provider, you will need to determine how much you can invest in training and mentoring your staff. On-line courses can be very helpful. However, there is nothing like sending your staff to a face to face direct training. And if you can afford it, it is ideal to bring in experts to work directly with your staff, onsite, in your own community. When you bring in your own trainers, they can respond to the particular issues with which you are grappling and respond to individual cases. In a sense, they can individualise the learning to your service and environment.

Trying It Out - Piloting New Practices

Many providers start with pilot projects to test out new approaches. These projects allow you to develop and test strategies and procedures that will support your staff as they move into broader implementation.

What is a Pilot Project?

Pilot projects are small projects conducted with fidelity to a model or plan you are considering using on a broader scale. If you are doing a customized employment pilot, for example, every step in the process should be followed. Data should be taken and analysed to help the team see what has worked and what has not. The pilot is your opportunity to make mistakes and achieve your successes on a small scale. You want to learn from your pilot and use that information to improve how you are carrying out your implementation. It is critical to start off correctly and with high quality. That will set the stage for the scaling up of your efforts.

Why Pilot?

Transformation requires thoughtful, careful program development. That is why piloting or proto-typing work first programs are an effective approach. The goal for a pilot is to learn how to get results, create a core staff who have learned key tools and strategies, develop initial useful partnerships, address issues and challenges, revise strategies, project staffing and program requirements based on your findings, evaluate current costs and funding, and make projections of anticipated costs and funding for a full-scale project.

A pilot can also be a means to demonstrate results to funders and stakeholders. You might show a funder that a particular approach will get them the results they are looking for. Also, a pilot effort, with good results, might be just what you need to encourage hesitant individuals and families to give employment a try. Good outcomes and testimonials for employers may jump start community integrated employment in your community.

Who are Good Candidates with which to start a Pilot?

Begin with those people who are already expressing interest in work. You will have some people for whom the transition to open integrated employment may be a significant challenge. They may have worked in facility-based employment for an extended period and the change is very daunting for them. You do not want to forget those people, but they may not be the best candidates with whom to start. Start with those who are eager. Achieve success with them and then use that success to market the opportunity back to those more reluctant individuals.

Does that mean that I should start with the people that appear to be easiest to get jobs?

No. Starting with those people expressing interest in work does not mean starting with those with the fewest barriers to employment. In fact, it is very important to include people with higher support needs in your first job placements. Staff and other stakeholders need to see that you can be successful with open integrated job placements for people with varying degrees of challenges to employment. If you start off including this population in the job placement effort from the beginning, you will minimise the inclination to focus on the job seekers who are considered the easiest to place and to neglect of others.

Take the Time to Learn from your Pilot—revise your Initial Plans

Your pilot should have given you a lot of valuable information and answered important questions. Do you need to revise your staffing pattern? How much management time does the work require? What additional procedures do you need to support staff and work effectively with individuals? Are you getting outcomes you anticipated? If not, what were the challenges you encountered? Are there structural or staffing changes that can help you overcome those challenges?

Ensuring Sustainability

As you construct your model, you will want to project its sustainability past the pilot stage. Questions you will want to ask are: If we have temporary pilot funding, do we have a possible funding source for our ongoing work? Can we project that the proportion of management costs to direct support costs will go down as we learn techniques and begin to achieve outcomes? How do we plan to reallocate costs as we decentralise our services? As you begin to implement your programs, you will want to review your results, costs and funding to evaluate the sustainability of the model you have created.

Think Big, Start Small, Scale Quickly

Plan on evaluating your pilot every quarter, and as soon as you are getting solid results that you have reason to think are replicable, start bringing the project to scale as quickly as your funding will allow. Bringing to scale as quickly as possible is advisable for a variety of reasons. First, you will help many more people find employment and a place in their community. Second, you will spread program management and administrative costs in a way that a pilot effort cannot accomplish. Third, you will gain credibility with your funders, stakeholders and business partners when they see that the program is moving forward and expanding.

Chart out how you can effectively bring open integrated employment to scale

Ask yourselves; are there additional investments you need to make as you move from a pilot to a full- scale program that can place and support increasing numbers of people into open integrated employment? Ask yourselves what investments in staff you may need. There may be a need to increase your management capability before your revenue increases. What do you need to demonstrate to your board in order to justify that investment? What technology do you need to manage a full-scale staff engaged in finding and maintaining employment opportunities for people? How will you offer trainings to larger numbers of staff?

Where Do We Start?

Customised Employment is different for every client, so it should be that it will be different in each organisation. That's doesn't mean that it's a free for all, it simply means that we follow the same steps but contextualise it for your organisations setting, clients and community.

Before any training can begin we need to understand your organisation. This allows us to contextualise the training to meet your needs, your staff and your client's aspirations. As indicated earlier in this document, we need to reviewing present operations and culture and identify your philosophy, values, vision, and mission.

Once we done this we will set a baseline for your organisation by conducting a value stream mapping exercise to identify what a day in the life of a client looks like. Truthfully, we'll look at a whole week's client interaction with your organisation. This will allow us to develop a present state map of your organisation. From here we can identify the key staff to be trained, contextualise the training to meet their needs and set in train the pilot and its required supports.

The Process of Implementing Customised Employment in an Organisation

Extensive experience in provider organisations nationally and internationally has illustrated that developing a true Customised Employment program is a multi-stage process. It focuses not merely on staff but engages with management, clients, family and the broader community through education, support and forums.

The process while appearing linear, is anything but due to the unique setting that each organisation exists in and the demands of clients and family.

The following steps are notionally the pathway;

- Review of organisation staff and capacity.
- Training of management and supervisors on the conditions needed to support CE.
- Training of selected staff in Customised Employment – consultant-driven processes.
- Systematic Instruction Training – integral to CE.
 - Ongoing mentoring and support of staff to engage with clients, community and employers. This is initially a weekly process and is staff driven.
- Organisation clients and family forum.
- Value Stream Mapping to understand and eliminate any barriers to CE and staff.
- Training and support for staff and clients to undertake Self-Guided Discovery.
 - This involves community instruction and engages with the broader community, including schools. Mentoring is less intensive.
- Training and instruction around Group Guided Discovery.
- Train the Trainer after successful embedding of CE and CE champions identified.
 - Ongoing mentoring and support for Trainers. Mentoring as required.
- Research and evaluation – ongoing.

As mentioned, the process is not linear and adjusted according to issues and events that occur during the training and support processes. As an example, Value Stream Mapping can be triggered in response to issues that our mentoring and support staff uncover and continues as we create a future state map of the organisation.

We know that it takes about 12 months or about 5 – 6 Discovery documents before staff have their light-bulb moment and get it! It is for this reason that we support and mentor staff. Add to this the richer emotional involvement with the process and clients, and it is not hard to see why our standard practice is to support your staff with mentors that have backgrounds in mental health. Nope, no one is going down the rabbit hole; it is just that Customised Employment is a rewarding process that digs deep and encourages growth in the staff and their capacity to engage and use empathy with clients. You can imagine how rewarding it is to see clients grow, so we will shed a tear with you!

Self-Guided Discovery is an ideal tool to engage with families around NDIS planning and is effective at promoting self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Similarly, Self-Guided Discovery is a well-received tool to assist school career counsellors with transition to work planning. Group Guided Discovery is an advanced application of Discovery to higher functioning individuals who may or may not have a disability.

Customised Employment is an advanced skill set that puts the individual at the centre of the process and in charge of the deliverables. On average it takes about 35 hours to successfully undertake Discovery, although the process can be undertaken with a range of 20 - 60 hours.

The process is client driven and is about developing relationships; relationships with clients, families, employers and the community.

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