



Breaking Barriers: Navigating the Shift from Sheltered Workshop to Competitive Integrated Employment

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Suggested citation: Arredondo, M.; Block, S; Pearson, M; and Gross, J. (2024). Breaking barriers: Navigating the shift from sheltered workshop to competitive integrative employment. Center on Community Living and Careers, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University. <https://iidc.indiana.edu/cclc/doc/competitive-integrated-employment/resources-for-leadership-and-policymakers/breaking-barriers-navigating-the-shift-from-sheltered-workshop-to-competitive-integrated-employment.pdf>.

June 30, 2024

Overview

This report shares findings from a comprehensive evaluation of the literature on the factors influencing a successful transition from sheltered workshop employment to competitive integrated employment (CIE) for people with disabilities. This initial report provides a foundational understanding of the challenges and barriers identified, accompanied by compensatory strategies for surmounting these hurdles.

Current Landscape: A Bold Shift in the Disability Employment Paradigm

In recent years, a seismic shift in legislative and political landscapes, epitomized by the significant 2014 implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), has propelled a radical transformation in the approach to employment for individuals with disabilities. The evolving ethos emphasizes a decisive move toward integrated and competitive employment as the new standard. Acknowledging the profound impact of meaningful work on conferring dignity and fostering social inclusion, there is a resounding call to redefine the support services for individuals with disabilities (Shouse, 2016). A significant reevaluation of these services has prompted a departure from sheltered workshop programs (Crandell, 2022; Lyons et al., 2018; National Disability Rights Network, 2011). The Fair Labor Standards Act (2011) allows subminimum wages under a 14(c) certificate,

but concerns arise due to the isolating nature of sheltered workshops and meager wages (May-Simera, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). This perpetuates negative perceptions and hinders social integration, impacting overall well-being (Avellone et al., 2023).

Thirteen states have already embarked on eliminating subminimum wages, and 38 states have embraced the Employment First concept, highlighting the importance of integrated community settings for individuals with disabilities (Gomez Antolinez & Gurney, 2023; Sulewski et al., 2017). This reflects a growing acknowledgment of inclusivity and equitable opportunities in both the workforce and society. Exemplifying this shift is Indiana's implementation of the Employment First Act in 2017 (Indiana Senate Enrolled Act No. 290), emphasizing the state's commitment to prioritizing employment for individuals with disabilities. The state aims to raise competitive integrated employment to 38% by 2027. Indiana's Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS) is utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to facilitate the transition from sheltered work to competitive integrated employment through methodical assessment, provider assistance, and statewide transformation (Gomez Antolinez & Gurney, 2023; National Disability Rights Network, June, 2023). This expanding momentum presents an occasion for meaningful transformation in services rendered to individuals with disabilities, which necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of principles guiding integration into the workforce.

While CIE doesn't guarantee an elevated quality of life, it is widely acknowledged that employment generally has positive impacts on an individual's quality of life, regardless of disabilities (Francis et al., 2014). Community employers also benefit from competitive employment through heightened productivity, and access to various employment-related services and supports contributes to societal benefits by reducing individual support expenses. Despite these advantages, individuals with disabilities currently face alarmingly high unemployment rates, with only 34.8% actively participating in the workforce compared to 74.4% of individuals without disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

Historically, sheltered workshops emerged as structured activities for individuals with disabilities outside their homes. These workshops became preferred support options for families with children with disabilities due to consistent and stable opportunities (Blick et al., 2016; National Disability Rights Network, 2011). The ongoing shift away from sheltered options will significantly impact families and individuals involved in these programs. Understanding family viewpoints is crucial due to their substantial influence on the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities (Francis et al., 2014).

Acknowledging potential resistance or uneasiness from families and individuals currently engaged in sheltered programs is essential in the current socio-political context. Initiatives aiming to reshape services, whether by addition or removal, require a full grasp of participant perspectives for effective management of the transition to competitive employment, meeting

all stakeholders' requirements (Kamau & Timmons, 2018). With this understanding at hand, we are currently in the process of interviewing individuals and families who have gone through the transition from sheltered work to competitive integrated employment and those who are currently going through the process. The qualitative research findings will yield crucial insights, enabling us to formulate impactful recommendations that carry significant implications for the practices and implementation strategies of adult service providers. These recommendations will be detailed in a follow-up report that will also highlight individuals' stories.

Methodology: Comprehensive Exploration of Transition Dynamics

Our examination of the research literature focused on the transition process from sheltered workshop employment to competitive integrated employment and is grounded in a systematic review leveraging peer-reviewed research articles sourced from academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Indiana University's library system resources. Employing key phrase searches, including terms like "14c transformation," "sheltered to competitive transition," "barriers to competitive employment," and "facilitators of competitive integrated employment," has directed our inquiry into the existing scholarly discourse. To navigate state policy contexts, we reviewed state reports, policy briefs, and transition recommendations from official state websites (i.e. The Council of State Governments (CSG); Family and Social Services Administration of Indiana, 2024; Office of Disability Employment Policy & Department of Labor; SourceAmerica; ThinkWork! & Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston)).

Key Findings: Unveiling Transition Hurdles and Strategic Solutions

Our examination revealed nine primary barriers that individuals and their families face, significantly influencing a successful transition from sheltered employment to CIE. Simultaneously, we identified challenges encountered by community services agencies and their staff, directly impacting the outcomes of transitioning individuals to CIE. Furthermore, our research uncovered multiple strategies designed to mitigate or eliminate these identified barriers and challenges. We provide a comprehensive overview of these strategic solutions below. These findings collectively highlight the landscape of obstacles and offer practical pathways for overcoming them in the pursuit of successful transition to competitive integrated employment.

Barriers for Individuals and Families and Recommended Strategies

During the transition from sheltered employment to competitive integrated employment, numerous barriers have been pinpointed in the literature. In the following, we present

recommended strategies aligned with each identified barrier. These strategies are designed to assist leaders of community service agencies as they undergo institutional transformation aimed at supporting individuals with disabilities as they successfully navigate the transition into competitive integrated employment. By offering strategies that effectively address and mitigate obstacles, our aim is to facilitate a successful transition for adults with disabilities and their families.

For a list of resources focused on targeted strategies to 1) elevate technical expertise; 2) reduce bias; and 3) cultivate a proactive, adaptive, and collective agency mindset in order to ensure a smoother transition to competitive integrated employment, please refer to the Addendum section of [Transitioning to Competitive Integrated Employment: Communications Strategies for Providers & Messages for Families](#) or to [Agency Planning and Information Resources](#). Both documents are also available on the community Living and Careers website.

Knowledge Gaps

Insufficient awareness and knowledge gaps present obstacles to a successful transition to CIE for individuals and their family members, 14(c) staff, and employers alike. Individuals with disabilities and their families encounter significant informational barriers regarding CIE, with community rehabilitation provider staff often lacking the necessary knowledge to assist (Gross et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2018; Meltzer, 2018; Wehman et al., 2019). These gaps extend to awareness about various aspects of employment, contributing to a general reluctance towards CIE. Given the substantial influence of family perspectives on CIE decisions, addressing limited awareness necessitates coordinated efforts from stakeholders such as vocational rehabilitation agencies, educators, community rehabilitation provider staff, and state leadership (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020; GAO, 2021). Allocating state resources for effective information dissemination becomes crucial in empowering individuals and families to make informed choices, viewing CIE as a viable option (Lulinski et al., 2017).

A notable gap in technical expertise for CIE services among 14(c) staff, compounded by exclusionary mindsets and difficulties envisioning suitable employment opportunities, presents an additional barrier (Avellone et al., 2023; Harvey et al., 2016; Lulinski et al., 2017; Migliore et al., 2011). Failing to address these knowledge gaps and narrow mindsets impedes the seamless transition of resources from 14(c) staff to CIE, creating a substantial obstacle (Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Nettles, 2013).

The challenge of limited employer awareness and knowledge regarding disability employment underscores the need for inclusive recruitment practices (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Colella & Bruyere, 2011; Connelly et al., 2011) and for leveraging local employment

service programs for individuals with disabilities (Fraser et al., 2010; Hirschberg & Papadopoulos, 2016; Kaye et al., 2011). Employers need to familiarize themselves with workplace accommodations, including flexible work hours. They also need to learn and implement disability-accommodating interview strategies (Erickson et al., 2014; Jetha et al., 2018; Till et al., 2015). Furthermore, the misconception among employers that disabilities are correlated with higher accident rates contradicts actual rates of occurrence. Research does not support a connection between disability and workers' compensation or workplace injury rates. Employers, in general, are urged to adopt industry best practices, including performance feedback and disciplinary actions, as integral components of ongoing disability-related best practices (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2014; Kaye et al., 2011; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014).

Recommended Strategies

Coordinate Stakeholder Efforts

Encourage coordinated efforts from stakeholders, including Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation, educators, community rehabilitation provider staff, and state leadership, to address limited awareness barriers among individuals with disabilities and their families (Curda & GAO, 2021; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020).

Allocate Resources for Information Dissemination

Advocate for the allocation of state resources to facilitate information dissemination, which can empower individuals and families to make informed choices and perceive CIE as a viable option (Lulinski et al., 2017).

Promote Inclusive Engagement Employer Practices

Address limited employer awareness through inclusive engagement practices, such as information dissemination, reverse job fairs, and collaboration with local business networks, as well as by leveraging local employment service programs for individuals with disabilities (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Connelly et al., 2011; Forster, 2010; Gehman, 2015; Hirschberg & Papadopoulos, 2016; Hussman & Hussman Institute for Autism, 2017).

Educate Employers on Accommodations

Educate employers on workplace accommodations, including flexible work hours. Enhance awareness and knowledge of disability-accommodating interview strategies (Erickson et al., 2014; Jetha et al., 2018; Till et al., 2015) as well as the use of naturally occurring workplace supports.

Address Agency Staff Knowledge Gaps

Focus on addressing knowledge gaps among 14(c) staff, providing technical expertise for CIE services and challenging exclusionary mindsets, which can hinder suitable employment opportunities (Avellone et al., 2023; Gross et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2016; Lulinski et al., 2017; Migliore et al., 2011).

Enhance Information Dissemination

Implement targeted information dissemination on key topics, including supported and customized employment (e.g., Discovery, job exploration, negotiation, continued support), Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation supports, and accommodations and assistive technology (Gross et al., 2021).

By employing these strategies, stakeholders can collectively address limited awareness and knowledge barriers, fostering a more informed and supportive environment for individuals with disabilities transitioning to CIE.

Negative Attitudes, Stereotypes, and Implicit Bias

Extensive research underscores the adverse impact of negative attitudes and biases on the integration of individuals with disabilities into competitive employment (Carter et al., 2018; Forster, 2010; Gehman, 2015; Hall et al., 2018; Hussman & Hussman Institute for Autism, 2017). These barriers, originating from implicit bias and historical marginalization, pose a complex and interconnected challenge. Ableist mindsets, prevalent among employers, individuals with disabilities, family members, and agency personnel, highlight the need for meaningful change (Carter et al., 2018; Migliore et al., 2008).

Despite legislative efforts like Sections 501 and 503 of the Rehabilitation Act (WIOA, 2014) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (2008) aimed at narrowing the employment gap, implicit bias persists as a current issue, leading to unintended discrimination by employers and co-workers (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Legislation alone cannot address the underlying problem of implicit bias, rooted in learned associations and attitudes shaped by inaccurate stereotypes applied to people with disabilities (Barken, 2010; Friedman, 2020). These biases result in overlooked job applications, a lack of interview offers, denied opportunities to showcase skills, and exclusionary hiring decisions for individuals with disabilities. Even if hired, concerns persist about co-workers displaying disability prejudice, contributing to the inaccurate perception of incompetence (Friedman & Rizzoli, 2020).

The issue intensifies for individuals with disabilities holding intersecting identities, facing disparities due to universal implicit bias. Employers falsely believe people with disabilities cannot perform essential job functions, contributing to the attitudinal barrier of limited

employment access. Unfounded fears about increased demands on other employees and decreased productivity perpetuate the presumption of incompetence despite research findings (see for example, Bonaccio et al., 2020; Gaunt & Lengnick-Hall, 2014; Kaye et al., 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Schur et al., 2014).

Internalization of negative attitudes and stereotypes by individuals with disabilities, influenced by a historically pervasive ableist culture, may lead to doubts about their capacity for CIE (Dunn, 2019). Sheltered employment attendees may perceive themselves as burdens, reducing their motivation for transitioning to CIE (Giri et al., 2022; Nettles, 2013). Family members also harbor doubts, contributing to skepticism about job support services, employer accommodations, and effective communication in a socially interactive workplace (Gilson et al., 2018). Agency personnel within sheltered programs may express skepticism about the transition to CIE, hindering progress, and families may fear the unknown (Avellone et al., 2023; Curda & U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2021; Harvey et al., 2016; GAO, 2023; Timmons et al., 2019).

These entrenched attitudes and biases in the broader community need a multi-faceted approach to dispel negative perceptions and facilitate successful integration into CIE, targeting multiple stakeholder groups and addressing systemic societal perceptions (Caynak et al., 2022; Park et al., 2023).

Recommended Strategies

Cultural Competence Training

- Implement cultural competence training programs to address implicit bias among employers, individuals with disabilities, family members, and agency personnel (Gross, et al., 2021).
- Integrate social identity theory to foster a more inclusive and unbiased work environment (Carter et al., 2018; Gehman, 2015; Hussman & Hussman Institute for Autism, 2017; Inclusiveteach.com, 2021; Migliore et al., 2008).

Legislation Enhancement

Advocate for enhancements to existing legislation (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2008; WIOA, 2014, Sections 501 and 503) to specifically target implicit bias, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to narrowing the employment gap (Bonaccio et al., 2020).

Combatting Learned Stereotypes

Develop initiatives to combat learned stereotypes and inaccurate associations applied to people with disabilities, recognizing that legislation alone cannot address the underlying problem of implicit bias (Donnellan, 1984; Friedman, 2020; Gehman, 2015).

Promoting Equal Opportunities

- Encourage equal opportunities by addressing biases leading to overlooked job applications, lack of interview offers, and exclusionary hiring decisions.
- Focus on dispelling fears about increased demands on other employees and decreased productivity associated with individuals holding intersecting identities (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Gaunt & Lengnick-Hall, 2014; Kaye et al., 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Schur et al., 2014).

Addressing Internalization of Negative Attitudes

- Implement interventions that foster confidence in an individual's capacity for CIE to prevent and counteract the potential internalization of negative attitudes related to individuals' abilities to transition to CIE (Barken, 2010; Donnellan, 1984; Dunn, 2019; Forster, 2010; Gehman, 2015).
- Develop a peer mentoring network to assist in holistic education.

Support for Transitioning from Sheltered Employment

Increase motivation for transition to CIE by providing support to individuals in sheltered employment to combat self-perceptions that may be burdens. (Giri et al., 2022). Help individuals understand their abilities, strengths, and identity so they perceive themselves as a potential asset to an employer.

Recommended Strategies

Education for Family Members

- Educate family members to alleviate doubts about job support services, employer accommodations, and effective communication in socially interactive workplaces (Gilson et al., 2018; Gross et al., 2021).
- Develop a family mentoring network to assist in holistic education.
- Develop an online foundational training curriculum freely available to family members.
- Mitigate fears by providing preemptive informational services such as town hall meetings.
- Include families in the development of programs, trainings, resources, etc.

Access to Quality Training and Support Services

The 14(c) program has played a crucial role in providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Staff under this program are tasked with various responsibilities, including maintaining a safe work environment, providing job training, and administering medications when necessary. However, successful, supported, and customized employment strategies require a more advanced skill set. This involves systematic instructional techniques, fundamental training methods, task analysis, instructional plans, workplace assessments, natural supports, self-management training, effective accommodations, advanced job negotiation, marketing skills, and other competencies (Gross et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2018; Lulinski et al., 2017).

Failure to recognize and address this need, and the potential reallocation of resources from 14(c) employment to CIE, poses a significant barrier. Section 511 of the WIOA (2014) mandates comprehensive career counseling and information for individuals in 14(c) programs, emphasizing choices in CIE (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2020; GAO, 2023; Kuo et al., 2020; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019). Legal decisions such as *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999), *Lane v. Brown*, Case No. 3:12-cv-00138-ST (2016), and *United States v. Rhode Island*, 1:14-cv-00175 (2014) provide crucial information for informed choices and alternative training and support options.

However, access to information alone is insufficient for informed decisions. Many individuals with disabilities, especially those with a history in sheltered workshops or the 14(c) subminimum wage environment, need additional training, skill development, and ongoing support (Carter et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2018; National Disability Rights Network, 2011). Despite the mandated information pipeline in Section 511, challenges persist in transitioning to CIE (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020). Skills acquired and training imparted in sheltered settings do not seamlessly translate into the demands of CIE (Crawford & Goodman, 2013). Transitioning requires access to specialized training initiatives, comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services, tailored assistive technologies, and proficient job placement support (Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Lyons et al., 2022). The absence of such robust support hinders an individual's ability to secure and sustain competitive employment opportunities (Haber et al., 2016; Test et al., 2009).

A challenge highlighted in the literature is not only the accessibility of services but also the quality with which they are provided (Adams et al., 2019; Castillo & Larson, 2020).

"Quality" encompasses dimensions such as waiting time and the agency's competence in creating effective job strategies aligned with individual strengths and preferences (Cox & Land, 2019; Remund et al., 2022; Riesen et al., 2022; Wehman et al., 2018).

Evidence supports the idea that individuals transitioning from sheltered work environments to CIE require supplementary training, personalized assistance, and access to assistive technologies (Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Nettles, 2013). Addressing these needs through specialized training programs and quality vocational rehabilitation services can significantly enhance their prospects for successful integration into competitive employment settings.

Recommended Strategies

Prioritize Advanced Skill Development

- Emphasize staff needs for a more advanced skill set, including systematic instructional techniques, task analysis, and self-management training, to enhance supported and customized employment strategies (Indiana Department of Education, 2023).
- Advocate for the provision of state-subsidized funding for competency development and training of 14(c) staff identified to provide CIE facilitation, including Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE)-endorsed Employment Consultant Training, Discovery training, and identified best practices.

Address Barriers to Transition

- Recognize and address barriers stemming from the potential reallocation of resources from 14(c) staff to CIE.
- Implement comprehensive career counseling and information programs mandated by Section 511 of WIOA (2014) to guide individuals in 14(c) programs toward informed choices in CIE.

Leverage Legal Decisions for Informed Choices

Utilize legal decisions such as *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999), *Lane v. Brown*, Case No. 3:12-cv-00138-ST (2016), and *United States v. Rhode Island*, 1:14-cv-00175 (2014) to provide individuals with crucial information for making informed choices and exploring alternative training and support options (Disability Employment TA Center, n.d.).

Promote Additional Training and Support

Recognize the insufficiency of information alone and promote additional training, skill development, and ongoing support for individuals with disabilities, especially those with a history in sheltered workshops or the 14(c) subminimum wage environment (Gross et al., 2021; Indiana Department of Education, 2023).

Highlight the Discrepancies in Skills Transfer

- Address the challenge of skills acquired in sheltered settings not seamlessly translating into the demands of competitive integrated employment (Indiana Department of Education, 2023).
- Stress the importance of specialized training initiatives, comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services, tailored assistive technologies, and proficient job placement support in facilitating successful transitions (Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Lyons et al., 2022).

Address Quality of Service Accessibility

- Acknowledge and address the challenge highlighted in the literature regarding not only the accessibility but also the quality of services provided (Grossi & Andresen, 2023).
- Define "quality" in terms of waiting time, agency competence, and the creation of effective job strategies aligned with individual strengths and preferences.

Implement Specialized Training Programs

Advocate for and implement specialized training programs to address the unique needs of individuals transitioning from sheltered work environments to competitive and integrated employment (Gross et al., 2021; Indiana Department of Education, 2023).

Enhance Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Provide comprehensive and quality support for individuals seeking competitive employment opportunities by strengthening and enhancing state agencies responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services.

Promote Assistive Technologies

Encourage access to and use of tailored assistive technologies to facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into competitive employment settings.

Emphasize Personalized Assistance

Stress the importance of personalized assistance in the form of individualized support plans and strategies to meet the specific needs of each transitioning individual (Butterworth et al., 2007).

Financial Considerations & Benefits

For individuals with disabilities and their families, reliance on specific benefit programs is a crucial aspect of their lives, covering income, health care, and various forms of assistance.

The potential impact on benefits or perceived drawbacks resulting from increased earned income is a concern expressed by both individuals and families (Fyffe et al., 2021).

Wages earned through 14(c) employment often fall below the threshold triggering a reduction in public benefits, like Supplemental Security Income (SSI). However, there is a fear that transitioning to CIE could jeopardize benefits, including health care coverage and supports and services, due to the potential effect on eligibility. Despite the potential of benefits counseling to alleviate these concerns by providing accurate information (Curda & GAO, 2021; Kaya et al., 2023; Rosenthal et al., 2012; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019), the initial fear may prevent individuals and families from seeking benefits counseling, leading to an incomplete understanding of their options.

This fear is understandable, as individuals and their families receiving government subsidies are naturally alarmed by the possibility of losing or disrupting their benefits (Iwanaga et al., 2021). The literature highlights a persistent obstacle, the “benefit-related barrier,” highlighting the need for the provision of accurate information by service support professionals. Anecdotal evidence suggests a long-standing issue of misinformation regarding Social Security and other entitlements, emphasizing the substantial consequences of inadequate or inaccurate information. Individuals and families find themselves unable to make well-informed choices, particularly regarding pursuing competitive integrated employment. Therefore, it is crucial to address the benefit-related barrier and ensure that professionals entrusted with assisting individuals and families provide accurate and comprehensive information to facilitate informed decision-making processes.

In this context, professionals must adhere to the principle of “do no harm,” refraining from disseminating information they are not qualified to provide, especially concerning the complexities of earned income, limitations, work incentives, or recommending limited work options due to a lack of knowledge and certification as a benefits counselor. Note that the Social Security Administration (SSA) offers free benefits counseling services to individuals considering or already working in CIE (National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019).

Recommended Strategies

Provide Comprehensive Benefits Counseling

- Offer accurate and comprehensive benefits counseling to individuals and families to address concerns about potential impacts on benefits during the transition to CIE. This should include expanded availability of benefits counseling and awareness to people currently attending 14(c) workshops. (Gross et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2018; Kaya, et al., 2023; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019).

- As part of a training exercise for individuals and families, create 5-10 scenarios of individuals in 14(c) programs. Assign each fictitious individual an earned income and illustrate and discuss the resulting impact on benefits. Distribute these scenarios using various media or present and share them in town hall or small group discussions.
- Emphasize the importance of seeking benefits counseling to gain a thorough understanding of options and potential effects on income and health care coverage (Barth et al., 2020; Gross et al., 2021; Kaya, et al., 2023).

Alleviate Fear Through Education

Implement and promote educational initiatives such as virtual webinars or Indiana Family Employment Awareness Training to alleviate fears associated with potential disruptions in benefits. Highlight success stories and showcase instances where transitioning to CIE has positively impacted both income and benefits (Gross et al., 2021; Kaya, et al., 2023).

Leverage Social Security Administration Services

Encourage individuals to use free benefits counseling services provided by the Social Security Administration and specifically designed for those considering or already engaged in CIE (Kaya, et al., 2023; National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023).

Address Misinformation

- Tackle misinformation by promoting awareness campaigns that emphasize accurate information regarding Social Security and entitlements. Work with other agencies to develop common language and messaging (Gross et al., 2021).
- Ensure support service professionals are certified to provide accurate information and are aware of the potential consequences of inadequate or inaccurate guidance.

Adhere to Ethical Principles

Emphasize the ethical principle of "do no harm" among support service professionals, urging them to refrain from disseminating information they are not qualified to provide, especially regarding the complexities of earned income, limitations, and work incentives (Donnellan, 1984; Gehman, 2015; Inclusiveteach.com, 2021).

Promote Certification for Benefits Counselors

Advocate for the certification of professionals acting as benefits counselors to ensure they possess the necessary knowledge and expertise to effectively guide individuals and families (Kaya, et al., 2023).

Highlight Work Incentives

Educate individuals and families about existing work incentives to demonstrate that pursuing CIE does not necessarily result in a complete loss of benefits (Gross et al., 2021; Kaya et al., 2023).

Emotional and Psychological Barriers

Transitioning from sheltered workshop employment to CIE presents multifaceted emotional and psychological challenges for individuals with disabilities and their families, as outlined in the literature. Emotional barriers encompass a spectrum of feelings, fears, and uncertainties, including loss of the attachment and comfort derived from the sheltered workshop environment (GAO, 2023; Hall et al., 2018; Harvey et al., 2016; National Disability Rights Network, 2011; Nettles, 2013). The prospect of change induces anxiety, reluctance, and resistance to transition, with concerns about severing established relationships adding to the emotional hurdles (Carter et al., 2018; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020). The fear of lacking a place to go and apprehensions of confinement amplify these emotional barriers (Ne'eman, 2015).

Psychological barriers involve cognitive processes and thought patterns shaping behavior. A prominent manifestation is the "Fear of Change and Loss," encompassing anxieties about adaptability, performance, fitting in, and acceptance in new work settings (Harvey et al., 2016; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020;). Families express concerns about safety outside the sheltered environment, communication limitations, and health-related needs, creating an intricate interplay of psychological processes that curtail motivation for competitive employment (Carter et al., 2018; Curda & GAO, 2021; Safronova, 2023).

These interwoven emotional and psychological complexities underline the need for tailored support and interventions to address these hurdles. Encouraging families to consider the documented benefits of CIE is crucial. Research demonstrates economic and psychological advantages, emphasizing the need for an ethical rationale supporting equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Butterworth et al., 2015; Robertson et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2022). CIE outcomes include increased economic well-being, enhanced psychological well-being, and improved physical health (Brooke et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2019; Schall et al., 2020; Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001).

The legislative landscape supporting alternatives to sheltered employment provides a compelling reason to implement strategies facilitating successful CIE. Notably, CIE may not necessarily entail full-time employment, especially for those with significant disabilities. Programs dedicated to overall well-being should invest in reimagining service delivery and

enhancing staff competence, dispelling myths about the higher cost of providing CIE as a conversion barrier (Cimera 2010; Schall et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021).

Recommended Strategies

Promote the Benefits of Competitive Integrated Employment

Encourage families to consider the well-documented benefits of CIE. Extensive research has demonstrated economic and psychological advantages (Butterworth et al., 2015; Gross et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2022). Strategies such as stories highlighting personal successes should focus on highlighting these benefits to alleviate apprehensions and foster a positive perspective on CIE.

Emphasize an Individual’s Right to Employment Inclusion and Access

Uphold the belief that all individuals, including those with disabilities, are equal human beings with the right to access necessary support and opportunities for CIE. Strategies should emphasize the ethical rationale for inclusive employment, aligning with the principles of equality and human rights (Donnellan, 1984; Forster, 2010; Gehman, 2015; Hussman & Hussman Institute for Autism, 2017; Inclusiveteach.com, 2021).

Communicate the General Benefits of Employment

Emphasize the general benefits of employment, such as social connectivity, a sense of belonging, and an overall improved quality of life. Strategies should leverage these universal aspects of employment to underscore the importance of CIE for individuals with disabilities (Gross et al., 2021).

Highlight Economic and Psychological Well-Being

Highlight specific outcomes associated with CIE, including personal success stories, increased economic well-being, enhanced psychological well-being, and improved physical health (Brooke et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2021; Wehman et al., 2017). This information can be instrumental in motivating families and individuals to consider CIE.

Address the Flexibility of CIE

Clarify that CIE may not necessarily entail full-time employment for everyone, especially individuals with significant disabilities. Strategies should communicate that CIE can represent only a portion of weekly hours, allowing for flexibility tailored to individual interests, needs, and capabilities (Cassidy et al., n.d.; Inge et al., 2017; Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.).

Invest in Skill Competence and Prepare for Changes to Support Services

Reimagine service delivery, enhance staff skill competence, and ensure support structures are in place for successful CIE implementation. Organizations and programs dedicated to improving the overall well-being of those they support must invest in themselves.

Dispel Myths Regarding Cost Barriers

Address concerns about the cost of providing CIE by dispelling myths and providing evidence to the contrary (Cimera, 2010; Cimera, 2011; Gross et al., 2021; Schall et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021). Strategies should include clear communication on the economic feasibility of transitioning to CIE, debunking misconceptions that may hinder program conversion.

Safety Concerns

Concerns about workplace safety significantly impact the transition to CIE, as evidenced by a 2016 study involving visits to 75% of Indiana's sheltered workshops and interviews with over 85 community service providers and 140 workers with diverse disabilities (Indiana Disability Rights, 2016). The findings reveal that safety concerns can diminish CIE opportunities for individuals with disabilities, encompassing worries about their treatment by co-workers and customers and concerns about behaviors negatively affecting the comfort of others in the CIE environment. Specific fears include potential injuries or mistreatment within the CIE setting. However, interviewees also noted instances of sheltered workplace injuries as reasons for dissatisfaction with 14(c) environments. These injuries ranged from repetitive stress injuries to injuries caused by fellow sheltered workshop workers. These safety concerns evoke fear among stakeholders within both the CIE context and sheltered workshops.

Distrust of professional service providers, present in both sheltered employment and CIE settings, is an additional barrier, possibly linked to safety concerns or emotional/psychological issues (Hall et al., 2018). Dague (2012), supported by Kregel et al., (2020), notes families' general distrust in the sufficiency of professional CIE services after a potential conversion away from 14(c) employment settings, indicating family distrust that professional CIE service staff can provide long-term workplace support. The hesitance to leave sheltered employment is shaded with distrust of success (Fyffe et al., 2021). Individuals who have had negative experiences with CIE may generalize this distrust in any future opportunities, regardless of the reason for those negative experiences, thereby creating lasting distrust in CIE (Brown et al., 2016; Migliore et al., 2008).

Recommended Strategies

Address Safety Through Assessments, Trainings, Program Development, and Peer Support

- Conduct comprehensive safety assessments in sheltered workshops and CIE settings (Indiana Disability Rights, 2016).
- Work with employers to implement training programs for co-workers and customers in CIE settings to ensure respectful and inclusive treatment of individuals with disabilities, mitigating worries about mistreatment.
- Develop clear workplace behavior guidelines and communication strategies to address concerns about behaviors negatively affecting the comfort of others in the CIE environment.
- Establish mechanisms for reporting and addressing potential injuries or mistreatment within CIE settings, fostering a safe and responsive work environment.
- Provide counseling and informational sessions for individuals with disabilities and their families to address safety concerns and build trust in the efficacy of professional CIE services (Dague, 2012; Kregel et al., 2020).
- Offer support programs and resources for families to alleviate concerns about long-term workplace support and the perceived abandonment of individuals placed into CIE.
- Implement mentorship programs or peer support initiatives to assist individuals who have had negative experiences with CIE, promoting a positive and supportive transition.
- Continuously evaluate and improve safety measures in both sheltered workshops and in CIE settings, addressing evolving concerns and building confidence among stakeholders.

Transportation Access and Availability

Transportation poses a significant challenge for individuals transitioning from sheltered to competitive integrated employment (Curda & GAO, 2021; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020). Many individuals with disabilities, particularly those with significant impacts, face difficulties securing a vehicle operator's license and lack the financial means to purchase a vehicle. Even with knowledge and support for developing a Plan for Achieving Self Sufficiency (PASS), securing natural support for reliable transportation remains a challenge. Consequently, reliance on specialized transportation services becomes a common alternative, but its availability, costs, scheduling, and logistical considerations vary by community. The

appeal of securing transportation assurance from a 14(c) employer becomes evident when faced with the complexities of non-traditional work week transportation. Family schedules and disruptions further complicate transportation, leaving family members, often employed, or facing driving-related challenges, with unrealistic responsibilities. The absence of reliable transportation creates barriers to sustained competitive employment (Carter et al., 2018; Curda & GAO, 2021; Dague, 2012; Ne'man, 2015).

Recommended Strategies

Develop Community Transportation Partnerships

- Collaborate with community stakeholders to establish partnerships that enhance transportation options for individuals with disabilities (Curda & GAO, 2021).
- Educate families about transportation options in their communities. Identify access to public vehicles, ride sharing options, and create a menu of options to guide choosing the right option for various circumstances, e.g. inclement weather.

Financial Assistance Programs for Vehicle Access

Advocate for and create financial assistance programs to support individuals in obtaining a vehicle or necessary modifications (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020).

Promote PASS Development

Increase awareness and support for Plan for Achieving Self Sufficiency (PASS) development to allocate funds for transportation needs (Curda & GAO, 2021).

Enhance Specialized Transportation Services

Work toward improving the availability, affordability, and logistics of specialized transportation services in communities (Curda & GAO, 2021).

Flexible Transportation Scheduling

Advocate for flexible scheduling options in specialized transportation services to accommodate non-traditional work hours (Carter et al., 2018).

Encourage Employers to Provide Workers with Transportation Assurance

Encourage CIE employers to become active solution-finders when providing transportation alternatives. To address transportation complexities, solutions could include exploring carpooling with other employees, ride sharing, and being flexible with start/end shift times when specialized transportation is running late (Dague, 2012).

Raise Awareness About Family Transportation Challenges

Increase awareness among employers, providers, and policymakers about the challenges family members face when providing transportation (Neeman, 2015). These include the availability of accessible transportation options; the financial burden of transportation costs; and the time commitments involved in ensuring individuals can get to work, appointments, or other activities. By understanding the expectations, and the existing realities, policymakers can better support families in navigating these challenges, ensuring that they are not overwhelmed by unrealistic demands.

Advocate for Policy Changes

Advocate for policy changes that address transportation barriers, considering the impact on sustained competitive employment (Curda & GAO, 2021; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020).

Limited Availability and Access to Competitive Integrated Employment Opportunities

The limited availability and accessibility of essential services for accessing competitive employment opportunities pose a significant challenge for individuals with disabilities, impacting their successful transition from sheltered to competitive integrated employment (Curda & GAO, 2021; Hall et al., 2018; Luecking & Mank, 2022; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020). The transition involves facing barriers related to exposure and opportunities for CIE when individuals are accustomed to subminimum wage work environments, fostering pessimistic expectations (Curda & GAO, 2021; Rosenthal et al., 2012). Prioritizing effective transition strategies, such as supported employment, customized employment, internships, and competency enhancement, becomes crucial to avoid hindrances in additional training, skill development, workplace supports, and career exposure for CIE (Wehman et al., 2018).

Navigating states' vocational rehabilitation referral systems and selecting a suitable community rehabilitation program are challenges individuals and their families face when expressing interest in alternative employment options. Concerns persist regarding community rehabilitation program expertise in meeting the specialized needs of individuals with significant disabilities, including deficiencies in job development and negotiation skills (Butterworth et al. 2000; Remund et al., 2022; Wehman et al., 2018). The "train first, place later" approach in sheltered environments and the impact of systemic and staff-related factors contribute to limited availability and access to services supporting CIE (Kregel et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2006; Rustad & Kassah, 2020; Santos, 2014).

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Funding issues, as highlighted by Curda and the GAO (2021), lead 14(c) staff to hesitate in providing CIE-focused services due to lower reimbursement rates. To address this, transitioning individuals from sheltered employment to CIE requires reshaping agency services around CIE, emphasizing a person-centered approach and adapting program practices and procedures (Avellone et al., 2023; Boeltzig-Brown, 2017; Isvan et al., 2023; Lyons et al., 2018; Nettles, 2013; Rogan & Rinne, 2011; Timmons et al., 2019).

Employers' potential reluctance to provide necessary workplace accommodations further complicates the transition, with individual and family fears that community rehabilitation provider agency staff lack expertise for competitive employment services (Carter et al., 2018; Wehman et al., 2018). Factors facilitating successful competitive employment include knowledge of business needs, enhanced marketing methods, and educating employers on disability-related issues (Jacob et al., 2022; Kregel et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2012). This lack of support and knowledge can hinder effective job performance and contribute to higher turnover rates, contrasting with the expressed desires of individuals attending sheltered workshops to engage in competitive integrated work (Carter et al., 2018).

Recommended Strategies

Prioritize Effective Transition Strategies

Implement supported employment, customized employment, internships, and competency enhancement to facilitate successful transitions (Nettles, 2013; Wehman et al., 2018).

Address Vocational Rehabilitation Challenges

Improve the navigation of the state vocational rehabilitation agency referral system and enhance the selection process for community rehabilitation programs to meet specialized needs (Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities, 2016; Butterworth et al., 2000; Remund et al., 2022; Wehman et al., 2018).

Challenge the "Train First, Place Later" Approach

Overcome the barriers posed by the "train first, place later" approach in sheltered environments, considering its impact on limited availability and access to services supporting CIE (Donnellan, 1984; Hussman & Hussman Institute for Autism, 2017; Kregel et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2006; Rustad & Kassah, 2020; Santos, 2014).

Address Funding Issues and Hesitation in Providing CIE Services

- Reshape agency services around CIE by adapting program practices and procedures that emphasize a person-centered approach (Avellone et al., 2023; Boeltzig-Brown,

2017; Isvan et al., 2023; Lyons et al., 2018; Rogan & Rinne, 2011; Timmons et al., 2019).

- Address funding issues highlighted by Curda and the GAO (2021) to eliminate hesitation in providing CIE-focused services due to lower reimbursement rates.

Enhance Employer Engagement and Workplace Accommodations

- Increase employer awareness by enhancing marketing methods, educating employers on disability-related issues, and emphasizing the benefits of competitive employment (Kregel et al., 2020; Jacob et al., 2022; Rosenthal et al., 2012).
- Address potential reluctance by employers to provide necessary workplace accommodations, ensuring that community rehabilitation provider agency staff have the expertise for competitive employment services (Carter et al., 2018; Wehman et al., 2018).

Mitigate Lack of Support and Knowledge Barriers

- Provide necessary support and knowledge to individuals transitioning to competitive integrated work to enhance job performance and reduce turnover rates (Carter et al., 2018; Nettles, 2013).
- Emphasize the benefits and possibilities of successful engagement in competitive integrated work (Gross et al., 2021).

Systemic and Policy-Related Barriers

The literature review underscores significant systemic and policy-related barriers hindering the transition from sheltered work to CIE. Complex and fragmented service delivery systems, limited collaboration among stakeholders, and policy challenges contribute to unequal access and exclusion from CIE consideration. Individuals and families report various barriers, including inadequacy of transportation options, intricacies of Social Security benefits, and challenges in rural communities (Hall et al., 2018; Kregel et al., 2020; National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023).

Transportation issues arise from fixed routes, limited hours, scheduling processes, and unreliable transportation, affecting work attendance. The complexity of Social Security benefits creates difficulties in informed decision-making about CIE, contributing to hesitancy due to perceived impacts on federal and state assistance (Kaya, et al., 2023; National Council on Disability, 2012). Rural areas face challenges with the availability of effective employment services, often limited to a single provider, restricting choice, and impeding effective service provision (Kregel et al., 2020). The ability to earn wages and insurance sufficient to replace state and federal assistance remains a barrier, with the federal minimum

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wage providing meager sustenance, especially for individuals with disabilities (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2023; National Core Indicators, 2022). Employer hiring hesitancy and lack of awareness about disability-related issues further hinder employment prospects (Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Jacob et al., 2022).

Systemic issues extend to the interaction among state vocational rehabilitation agencies, the Social Security Administration and workforce systems. Clarity in roles and functions is crucial for consumer and family understanding (Rosenthal et al., 2012). The literature review identifies additional systemic barriers within the educational system and adult service provider agencies (Goodman et al., 2020; Snell-Rood et al., 2020).

High school experiences reveal systemic barriers related to the lack of high-quality transition services and fractures in the sharing of information between high schools and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. Moreover, teachers lack knowledge regarding adult service systems beyond high school and best practices in CIE. Deficiencies in person-centered planning, fueled by lack of knowledge, results in less meaningful goal setting, impacting postsecondary success (Isvan et al., 2023; Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Early exposure to work experiences and career counseling enhances CIE success, emphasizing the importance of high expectations and opportunities (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Schall et al., 2020).

Educators' understanding of employability skills is crucial, exemplified by State Bill 297 in Indiana focusing on employability skill standards (Indiana Department of Education, 2023). Discrepancies in person-centered planning outcomes for Medicaid waiver recipients raise concerns, with 27-30% stating their desired community job is not reflected in their service plan (Isvan et al., 2023; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020).

Systemic barriers extend to state reimbursement rates for 14(c) services, potentially keeping agencies focused on sheltered employment (Curda & GAO, 2021). Inadequate oversight of 14(c) programs by the Department of Labor perpetuates subminimum wages and hinders access to CIE (GAO, 2023; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020).

Despite national support for Employment First, legislation alone is insufficient. The absence of designated civil rights oversight for people participating in 14(c) sheltered employment highlights the need for a broader cultural shift (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020). Legislation must be accompanied by a commitment to erasing implicit bias and historical marginalization of people with disabilities.

Recommended Strategies

Incorporate Stakeholders in CIE Teams

- Integrate waiver case managers into competitive integrated employment teams.

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- Provide improved training opportunities for case managers within the context of CIE transitions.
- Ensure active involvement of case managers in change efforts, state service plans, and policy developments.
- Seek out the participation of individuals with disabilities onto these teams, programs, and other projects.

Engage Chambers of Commerce and Employer Groups

- Foster collaboration with Chambers of Commerce and community employer groups.
- Provide education and information about increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Facilitate networking and problem-solving sessions involving employers, creating a platform for shared insights and solutions.

Shift Funding Focus

- Advocate for a shift in funding from 14(c) programs to community service providers emphasizing CIE.
- Align state policies with the goal of transitioning all community service funding away from 14(c) programs.
- Promote inclusive service provisions and community engagement as criteria for funding allocation.

Policy and Legislative Changes

- Explore policy and legislative changes to support a successful transition from sheltered to CIE.
- Incorporate the involvement of state waiver case managers and other stakeholders into legislative considerations.
- Emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders in shaping legislative initiatives.

State Service Plans and Change Efforts

- Include waiver case managers in the development and implementation of state service plans.
- Align change efforts with the goal of improving training opportunities for stakeholders involved in CIE transitions.

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- Ensure that state service plans explicitly address the systemic and policy-related barriers identified in the literature review.

Increase Community Awareness and Education

- Conduct outreach programs to increase community awareness of the benefits of CIE (Gross et al., 2021).
- Educate employers about the advantages of hiring individuals with disabilities and address misconceptions.
- Promote community-wide understanding of the value of CIE and inclusive employment practices.
- Provide access to curricula that focus on transition-educators' ability to facilitate CIE.
- Collaborate with schools to raise school and teacher involvement in CIE education.

Collaborate with Advocacy Groups

- Collaborate with disability advocacy groups to drive awareness and action (Gross et al., 2021).
- Leverage advocacy groups to influence policy changes that support CIE and inclusive community services.
- Include representatives from advocacy groups in discussions on systemic improvements.

Create Mechanisms for Monitoring and Evaluation

- Establish monitoring mechanisms to track the progress of transitioning from sheltered work to CIE.
- Implement regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of policy changes and funding shifts.
- Use feedback from stakeholders, including case managers and employers, to refine and improve initiatives over time.

Develop Cultural Shift Initiatives

- Launch cultural shift initiatives emphasizing the importance of erasing implicit bias and historical marginalization (Forster, 2010).
- Develop campaigns highlighting the civil rights aspect of attending 14(c) sheltered employment.
- Encourage a broader societal commitment to recognizing and valuing the contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

Engage in Inclusive Policy Dialogues

- Facilitate inclusive policy dialogues involving key stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities and their families (Gross et al., 2021).
- Create forums for open discussions on policy changes, ensuring consideration of diverse perspectives.
- Encourage collaborative decision-making processes to foster a sense of ownership and commitment among all stakeholders (Forster, 2010).

Conclusion

The comprehensive evaluation presented in this report sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics involved in transitioning individuals with disabilities from sheltered workshop employment to competitive integrated employment. Through a thorough examination of existing literature, we have identified significant challenges and barriers inherent in this process, ranging from systemic issues to individual-level concerns. However, amidst these challenges, promising compensatory strategies have emerged, offering pathways for overcoming obstacles and facilitating successful transitions to CIE. By leveraging this foundational understanding, stakeholders can cultivate more inclusive and supportive environments, empowering individuals with disabilities to access and thrive in competitive integrated employment opportunities. Moving forward, continued research, collaboration, and advocacy efforts are essential to foster a more equitable and inclusive landscape for all individuals in the workforce.

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