



# Unlocking Opportunities: Successful Transition from Sheltered Workshops to Competitive Integrated Employment for People with Disabilities

*Mariella Arredondo, Ph.D.; Sandra Block; Mary Pearson, Ph.D.; and Judith M.S. Gross, Ph.D.*

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## Introduction

In recent years, disability employment has undergone significant changes due to legislative and political shifts, notably the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014. This act emphasizes **competitive integrated employment (CIE)** as the standard for individuals with disabilities and moves away from the provision of the sheltered workshop model. While we recognize the benefits and the importance of meaningful work in promoting social inclusion and dignity, we also understand and acknowledge the barriers and challenges to making CIE a reality for individuals, families, and service providers. As leaders, policymakers, and educators, we can't ignore these challenges, so how do we successfully navigate these pivotal, momentous changes?

Our research team has explored various strategies to support the transition to CIE (Shouse, 2016; Stancliffe & Hall, 2023; Taylor et al., 2023). We extensively reviewed research literature, including peer-reviewed articles, state and national reports, and seminal works, and conducted interviews with key stakeholders: individuals with disabilities, their families, and employment service providers.

In this paper we integrate academic research with real-world insights from individuals and families in Indiana to present a comprehensive overview of best practices and strategic recommendations. We present policy and practice recommendations derived from our findings, aimed at overcoming challenges and leveraging effective strategies to facilitate the transition to CIE for people with disabilities. Our goal is to foster an inclusive society with maximized workforce participation through collaboration among individuals, educators, service agencies, families, policymakers, and communities.

### Overview

Historically, sheltered workshops emerged during the 1970s and 1980s as preferred support options for adults with significant disabilities and their families because sheltered workshops seemed to provide consistent and stable options outside the home (Blick et al., 2016). Because of the history of strong family advocacy for sheltered workshops in the past, the ongoing shift away from sheltered options requires a full understanding of participant perspectives and family viewpoints (Francis et al., 2014). Initiatives to reshape these services require careful consideration of stakeholder needs and concerns to ensure effective management of the transition to competitive employment.

The transition away from sheltered workshop programs has gained momentum, spurred by concerns over the isolating nature of these environments and the perpetuation of negative perceptions of people with significant disabilities and their ability to be employed (Avellone et al., 2023; Christensen & Richardson, 2017; Crandall, 2022; Ilyes, 2016; Lyons et al., 2022; May-Simera, 2018). While the original Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 allowed subminimum wages under a 14(c) certificate, there are growing concerns about the impact on individuals' well-being and social integration (Dlouhy & Mitchell, 2015; Fair Labor Act, 2011; Fiala, 2018; Smith et al., 2019; United States Government Accountability Office [US GAO], 2021).

Thirteen states have already moved to eliminate subminimum wages, and 38 states have embraced the Employment First concept (Brennan-Krohn, 2016; Corley, 2014; Antolinez & Gurney, 2023; Hein & Ansari, 2022; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020; Yildiz & Cavkaytar, 2022). The Employment First vision is that a state's policies and employment-based services for people with disabilities will focus on CIE first, instead of more segregated options. States that are adopting Employment First policies and practices are signaling a broader recognition of inclusivity and equitable opportunities in employment and beyond.

Indiana's implementation of the Employment First Act in 2016 exemplifies this shift, underscoring the state's commitment to prioritizing CIE for individuals with disabilities (Indiana SR 39—DR 3815/DI sw, 2016). With a goal to raise CIE to 38% by 2027, Indiana is utilizing funding from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act to facilitate the transition from sheltered work to competitive employment (American Rescue Plan Act, 2021).

Despite the potential benefits of CIE options for families of adult children with disabilities, such as improved quality of life and increased productivity, challenges persist in obtaining needed services and attaining Employment First policy outcomes (Francis et al., 2014). High unemployment rates among individuals with disabilities in Indiana highlight the need for comprehensive support and systemic change (Fyffe et al., 2021; Kessler Foundation, 2015). The purpose of this research is to discover and discuss barriers and strategies that Indiana policy makers and service providers can use as the state moves forward, working toward its CIE goals.

## Objectives

In this white paper, we describe the objectives, methodology, and findings of a research project funded by the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration's Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS). The project focused on supporting adults with disabilities and their families who are transitioning or planning to transition from sheltered workshop employment to CIE. The actionable recommendations we propose are intended to inform the practices and implementation strategies of adult service providers, supporting meaningful transformation in employment-related supports and services for individuals with disabilities. Further, the findings from this project are intended to provide DDRS with policy and practice recommendations that will support individuals during their transition to CIE, with the goal of fostering greater workforce inclusion and opportunity for individuals with disabilities.

## Methodology

For this project, we conducted research in two parts: (a) a comprehensive narrative literature review and (b) structured interviews. We conducted the comprehensive narrative literature review following the methodology outlined by Sukhera (2022). The primary research questions guiding this review were:

- 1. What barriers influence the transition from sheltered workshops to competitive integrated employment (CIE)?**
- 2. What best practices should agencies and other stakeholders employ to assist individuals with disabilities transitioning from sheltered work to CIE?**

We chose the narrative review approach due to the extensive scope of potential best practices relevant to the transition from sheltered workshops to CIE. This methodology provided the necessary flexibility for the researchers to accommodate the breadth of literature required for this large-scale review.

Our search strategy for relevant literature involved identifying key terms and phrases such as "sheltered workshop," "competitive integrated employment," "natural supports," "supported employment," "customized employment," "communicating with families about agency changes," "service agency philosophy changes," "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act," "transportation access for people with disabilities," "transition to work," "social security benefits," "work incentive programs," and "Employment First."

We utilized several academic databases accessible through the Indiana University Libraries system, including ERIC, PsycINFO, EBSCO, and Wiley Online Library. Additionally, we employed Google Search to locate federal and state reports pertinent to the keywords. Literature was limited to publications from the past 10 years unless a specific author had originated significant research on the topic.

The search spanned three months, with each researcher conducting at least three informal search and analysis cycles. The review resulted in the inclusion of 56 pieces of literature, selected for their relevance in providing best practices and critical information on transitioning from sheltered work to CIE. The

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analysis involved identifying key terms and phrases, ensuring the literature either justified or expanded upon these concepts, and then categorizing themes, codes, and barriers related to CIE.

The interdisciplinary team brought diverse expertise to the review and analysis process. One researcher had a background in vocational rehabilitation (VR) and transitioning to CIE, another in special education and agency transition, and the third in equitable service delivery for individuals with disabilities. These varied perspectives enriched the analysis and interpretation of the literature.

Following the literature review, we conducted structured interviews with individuals and agency staff involved in transitioning from sheltered work to CIE. The IU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research plan and supporting materials. We conducted interviews either in person or virtually with more than 30 participants who had successfully transitioned to CIE from a sheltered workshop or who were currently moving from sheltered work to CIE. We also interviewed the agency staff facilitating these transitions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word's dictate function, while extensive field notes were taken by one researcher during each interview. Two researchers were present at every interview to ensure multiple perspectives were captured. After conducting the interviews, each of the three researchers individually reviewed and analyzed the transcriptions, identifying key themes, codes, and categories from the data. This independent analysis allowed for a thorough examination of recurring patterns and insights. We then collaboratively compared these findings, cross-checking the themes across researchers to enhance reliability. Additionally, the identified themes were compared against the literature review findings to ensure alignment and methodological triangulation, following the process outlined by Delve and Limpaecher (2023). This triangulation process helped to validate the consistency of the data interpretations and enhance the credibility of the results.

The methodology ensured the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the critical factors involved in this transition. The research revealed both barriers and facilitators to a successful transition from sheltered to CIE.

Key findings included the following:

- Insights into the perceptions and confidence levels of individuals and families.
- Common concerns and barriers faced during the transition.
- Outcomes of the transition process and the experiences of families.

## Literature Review: Key Findings and Trends

This section presents and analyzes 13 key barriers to successful transitions into CIE that we identified through a comprehensive literature review. The table below outlines these key barriers. Each barrier is explored in terms of its challenges, relevant findings from academic and policy research, and actionable recommendations designed to overcome these challenges.

**Table 1. Findings from the Literature Review—Barriers and Recommendations**

Barrier	Findings	References	Recommendations
<b>Knowledge Gaps</b>	Lack of awareness of CIE transition process among stakeholders (VR agencies, educators, state leadership).	Avellone et al., 2023; Christensen & Richardson, 2017; Friedman & Rizzolo, 2020; Kuo et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2012	Increase stakeholder training on CIE processes through workshops, webinars, and strategic dissemination.
<b>Lack of Education for All Stakeholders</b>	Limited education on CIE best practices for service providers, families, and individuals with disabilities.	Araten-Bergman, 2016; Avellone et al., 2023; Christensen & Richardson, 2017; Collella & Bruyere, 2011; Connelly et al., 2011; Donnellan, 1984; Friedman & Rizzolo, 2020; Hall et al., 2018; Harvey et al., 2016; Inge et al., 2017; Kuo et al., 2020; Lulinski et al., 2017; Migliore et al., 2011; National Disability Rights Network, 2011; Rosenthal et al., 2012; Shouse, 2016; S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020	Implement ongoing professional development and family education on person-centered planning, Universal Design, and self-advocacy.
<b>Inadequate Implementation and Use of Individualized VR Plans</b>	Inconsistent implementation of individualized plans and supported employment programs.	Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities, 2016; Phasing Out Subminimum Wages, 2021; Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Kaya, et al. 2023; WIOA, 2014	Align vocational rehabilitation services with evidence-based CIE models, focusing on person-centered planning and goal setting.
<b>Lack of Customized and Supported Employment Pathways</b>	Lack of widespread adoption of CE and individualized career pathways. CE approaches are underutilized in transition.	Cassidy, Hartman & Griffin-Hammis Associates, n.d.; Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.; Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development et al., 2023;	Promote CE as a best practice for individuals with disabilities, offering employees training on creating customized job roles that align with individual strengths.

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Barrier	Findings	References	Recommendations
<b>Lack of Awareness About the History of Segregation</b>	Persistent lack of understanding of the historical segregation of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.	Blick et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2014; Fyffe et al., 2021; Kessler Foundation, 2015	Educate stakeholders on the historical context of segregation in sheltered workshops to emphasize the importance of inclusive, equitable employment opportunities.
<b>Negative Attitudes, Stereotypes, and Implicit Bias</b>	Negative stereotypes and biases prevent individuals with disabilities from accessing CIE opportunities.	Bonaccio et al., 2020; Campbell, 2001; Carter et al., 2018; Dovidio et al., 2011; Fredeen et al., 2012; Friedman, 2020; Friedman & Rizzoli, 2020; Groschl, 2013; Kaye et al., 2011; Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2014; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Migliore et al., 2008; Schur et al., 2014	Implement diversity and inclusion training for employers, focusing on implicit bias. Develop campaigns that emphasize the capabilities of individuals with disabilities to counteract stereotypes.
<b>Lack of Access to Quality Training and Support Services</b>	Insufficient access to high-quality training programs and support services tailored to individual needs.	Carter et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2018; Lulinski et al., 2017; WIOA, 2014	Enhance access to training programs designed to support individuals with disabilities in obtaining CIE. Provide continuous support throughout the employment process.
<b>Concerns About Finances and Benefits</b>	Financial disincentives and misunderstanding of benefits can deter individuals from pursuing CIE.	DiLeo et al., 1998; Fyffe et al., 2021; Iwanaga et al., 2021; National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023; U.S. GAO, 2021	Provide benefits counseling to individuals and families, emphasizing the financial advantages of CIE. Advocate for policies that remove financial disincentives and promote sustainable earnings.
<b>Safety Concerns</b>	Concerns about safety in CIE	Dague, 2012; Fyffe et al., 2021; Indiana Disability Rights, 2016; Kregel et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2008	Educate employers and service providers on safety protocols and promote inclusive

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Barrier	Findings	References	Recommendations
	environments limit participation.		safety planning in workplaces.
<b>Lack of Access to Reliable Transportation</b>	Lack of accessible transportation is a major barrier to consistent employment.	Carter et al., 2018; Curda & U.S. GAO, 2021; Dague, 2012; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020; U.S. GAO, 2021	Improve access to affordable and reliable transportation services. Advocate for local government support and policies that prioritize transportation access for individuals with disabilities.
<b>Day Services that Do Not Support CIE and Community Inclusion</b>	Traditional day services limit opportunities for employment and community inclusion.	Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment, 2016	Re-evaluate day services models and integrate employment-focused activities. Encourage the development of CIE-focused day services that prioritize community engagement and skill building for employment.
<b>Lack of Community Involvement and Slow Systems Change</b>	Lack of community support and insufficient systemic change slow down progress toward CIE.	Butterworth et al., 2007; Sulewski et al., 2017	Foster collaboration between community agencies, businesses, and policymakers to promote a more inclusive workforce. Encourage systemic change by advocating for policy reforms at local, state, and national levels.
<b>Outdated Policies</b>	Outdated policies and lack of advocacy slow the transition to CIE for individuals with disabilities.	American Rescue Plan Act, 2021; Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 2008; Grossi & Andresen, 2023; Noe, 2022; Olmstead, v. L.C., 1999; Olmstead v. L.C, 1999;	Advocate for reforms to employment policies that promote CIE. Focus on eliminating subminimum wage practices and improving legal protections for individuals with

Barrier	Findings	References	Recommendations
		Winsor et al., 2019; Wohl, 2015	disabilities to ensure equal employment opportunities.

Each barrier identified in the table above is explored in more detail in the section below in terms of its challenges, relevant findings from academic and policy research, and actionable recommendations designed to overcome these. The barriers reflect a range of issues that hinder CIE, from gaps in knowledge and training to policy and systemic shortcomings. Addressing these 13 interconnected barriers will support achieving equitable employment for individuals with disabilities. By implementing the recommendations associated with each barrier, stakeholders—including policymakers, service agencies, employers, and communities—can create a more inclusive society that maximizes workforce participation for all. The findings from this literature review underscore the importance of collaboration, education, and systemic change in driving successful transitions to CIE.

## Summary of Findings

### Identifying the Knowledge Gaps

A significant barrier to successfully transitioning from sheltered workshop employment to CIE is the lack of awareness and understanding of the transition process among key stakeholders, including among vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, educators, and state leadership (Avellone et al., 2023; Christensen & Richardson, 2017; Friedman & Rizzolo, 2020; Kuo et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2012). This knowledge gap hinders the implementation of effective strategies for transitioning individuals with disabilities from segregated settings to CIE.

Addressing these knowledge gaps requires coordinated efforts to disseminate clear, accessible information to all parties involved. Providing individuals with disabilities, their families, and professionals with the tools and knowledge necessary for this transition is crucial to its success (Wehman, 2013). Efforts must be made to improve the availability of training resources, including workshops and materials focused on the transition to CIE, to ensure stakeholders are well-prepared to support individuals throughout the process (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2020).

### Providing Education to All Stakeholders

A comprehensive education strategy is essential to equip all stakeholders—including service providers, individuals with disabilities, and their families—with the knowledge and skills necessary for a smooth transition to CIE (Kuo et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2012; Winsor et al., 2023). Many of these stakeholders, particularly those accustomed to sheltered workshops, may lack familiarity with practices like person-centered planning, self-determination, and Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024; Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001). These concepts are critical for empowering individuals with disabilities to take active roles in their employment journeys and enhance employment outcomes.



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Promoting the philosophies of presuming competence and the dignity of risk is also essential (Donnellan, 1984). Educating stakeholders about self-determination and customized employment practices—including job carving, job coaching, and natural supports—can further improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Hall et al., 2018; Inge et al., 2017; Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.; Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001). These training efforts should also focus on addressing misconceptions about CIE and dispelling myths that perpetuate the segregation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Connelly et al., 2011).

### **Ensuring Comprehensive Training on Customized Employment**

Customized Employment (CE) is a crucial approach for enhancing employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, and training on CE must be prioritized for all relevant stakeholders (Hall et al., 2018; Griffin-Hammis Associates, Inc., 2017; Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.). Education on CE should include best practices for job development, negotiation, and tailoring work environments to meet the needs of both employers and employees (Inge et al., 2017).

Educational efforts should target a broad array of stakeholders, including community service providers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, waiver case managers, educators, individuals with disabilities, and their families (Harvey et al., 2016; Lulinski et al., 2017). Effective training programs must also include modules on self-advocacy, person-centered planning, and addressing attitudinal barriers towards individuals with disabilities in the workforce (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001). By educating stakeholders on these key concepts, we can promote better collaboration and support for individuals with disabilities as they transition to CIE (National Disability Rights Network, 2011).

### **Expanding the Role of Vocational Rehabilitation; Focusing on Individualized Employment Strategies**

The reauthorization of WIOA (2014) expanded VR services to include Discovery, customized employment, and supported employment, benefiting individuals transitioning from sheltered work to CIE (Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities, 2016; American Rescue Plan Act, 2021 Griffin-Hammis Associates, Inc., 2017). Additional practices like transportation coordination, benefits counseling, and ongoing person-centered planning enhance success during this transition (Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Kaya et al., 2023).

In addition, providing holistic assistance to sheltered workshop providers can further support the transition process. Evidence suggests that sheltered workshops with trained benefits counselors who are involved with an assigned VR counselor show increased enthusiasm for CIE compared to those without counselors, highlighting the importance of personalized support and benefits counseling (Kamau & Timmons, 2018; Kaya et al., 2023).

### **Implementing Customized Employment and New Pathways to CIE**

To enhance the success of CIE, it is essential to adopt new and expanded employment practices that focus on the strengths and capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Customized employment (CE), supported

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employment, and individualized planning are critical approaches that prioritize the unique skills, interests, and needs of each person (Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.; Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development et al., 2023). These strategies shift away from outdated models that suggest individuals with disabilities must "earn" their right to employment. Instead, CE emphasizes discovering the "personal genius" of each individual and customizing job roles to match their strengths and preferences (Cassidy et al., n.d.; Griffin-Hammis Associates, Inc., 2017). This approach not only enhances job satisfaction but also improves long-term employment outcomes.

## **Elevating Awareness Through the History of Segregation**

Raising awareness of the historical segregation of individuals with disabilities is essential for promoting inclusivity and addressing concerns around safety. Stakeholders must recognize the lasting harm of sheltered workshops and other segregated employment practices, which have historically marginalized people with disabilities while also limiting their economic opportunities and reinforcing negative stereotypes (Blick et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2014; Sundar et al., 2018).

Despite progress in disability rights, many stakeholders still operate under outdated perceptions of disability and employment. These beliefs often stem from limited exposure to integrated employment models and a lack of understanding about their effectiveness (Fyffe et al., 2021). Educational initiatives should provide a historical overview of discrimination and exploitation within sheltered workshops, helping stakeholders grasp the significance of equitable employment opportunities (Kessler Foundation, 2015). Understanding this context highlights the importance of integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce and adhering to principles of equal treatment and opportunity.

## **Addressing Negative Attitudes, Stereotypes, and Implicit Bias**

Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and implicit biases remain significant barriers to the successful integration of individuals with disabilities into CIE (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2018; Friedman & Rizzolo, 2020; Migliore et al., 2008). These biases often manifest during the recruitment and hiring processes, where individuals are overlooked based on personal characteristics, such as disability, rather than their qualifications and capabilities. For example, employers may unconsciously favor candidates who resemble themselves in terms of background and experiences, which can disadvantage individuals from minority groups or those with disabilities (Gaunt & Lengnick-Hall, 2014; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Furthermore, stereotypes—such as the assumption that individuals with disabilities are less capable of handling job demands—persist, even when evidence of their qualifications and skills proves otherwise (Fredeen et al., 2012; Groschl, 2013).

Implicit bias can significantly influence employer decisions, often leading to discriminatory hiring practices (Hernandez & McDonald, 2007; Kaye et al., 2011). Such biases perpetuate inequitable access to employment for individuals with disabilities and other marginalized groups. These persistent negative attitudes not only restrict employment opportunities but also contribute to internalized biases, where individuals begin to doubt their own abilities. This internalization can result in lowered self-esteem,

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decreased motivation to pursue competitive employment, and diminished career aspirations (Dovidio et al., 2011; Schur et al., 2014).

Addressing these negative attitudes and biases requires intentional efforts to promote education, awareness, and training focused on reducing implicit bias and fostering inclusive workplace cultures (Campbell, 2001; Kaletta et al., 2012). Employers must be educated on the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the tangible benefits that individuals with disabilities bring to the workforce. Additionally, initiatives aimed at combating stereotypes, encouraging self-advocacy, and promoting equal opportunities can help break the cycle of exclusion and foster a more inclusive labor market (Bonaccio et al., 2020).

### **Increasing Access to Quality Training and Support Services**

Successful transitions to CIE require that staff working within 14(c) programs possess advanced skills tailored to training others to provide individualized support (Lulinski et al., 2017). However, despite the mandates outlined in Section 511 of the WIOA (2014), many provider service teams lack the necessary training, technical knowledge, and ongoing professional development to effectively assist individuals moving from sheltered workshops to CIE. Research emphasizes that the effectiveness of these transitions is directly tied to access to high-quality vocational rehabilitation services and continuous support systems (Carter et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2018). To address these gaps, specialized training programs should foster critical competencies, such as individualized employment planning, skills assessment, and workplace inclusion strategies. Ongoing professional development for service providers and interagency collaboration is essential for sustaining long-term employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

### **Addressing Financial Considerations and Benefits**

Financial concerns remain a significant barrier to CIE, particularly regarding potential loss of benefits for individuals with disabilities. Fear of losing essential financial and healthcare supports during the transition to full-time employment can deter individuals from seeking competitive work (Fyffe et al., 2021; Iwanaga et al., 2021). Research indicates that comprehensive benefits counseling—coupled with targeted educational initiatives—is critical to alleviating these concerns (Rosenthal et al., 2012; U.S. GAO, 2021). Accurate benefits information must be provided by certified professionals who adhere to ethical principles and are well-versed in the complexities of benefit programs. Certification and continuous training for benefits counselors ensure that individuals and their families receive up-to-date, accurate information regarding work incentives and financial planning (DiLeo et al., 1998; National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023). This proactive approach can empower individuals with disabilities to make informed decisions about employment, mitigating concerns about the loss of critical supports.

### **Addressing Safety Concerns**

People with disabilities and their families often list safety concerns as a crucial consideration when making decisions about moving toward CIE (Dague, 2012; Indiana Disability Rights, 2016). Research highlights that these fears often result in reluctance to pursue employment opportunities, limiting access

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to CIE (Fyffe et al., 2021; Kregel et al., 2020). Service agencies that assist individuals to obtain CIE must implement inclusive safety protocols that address their unique needs. Additionally, training for both employers and employees is necessary to ensure a safe work environment. By creating robust safety frameworks, the concerns about safety can be significantly reduced, allowing individuals to work confidently and securely in the community (Migliore et al., 2008).

### **Increasing Transportation Access and Availability**

Limited access to reliable, affordable transportation continues to be a major obstacle to achieving CIE. Financial constraints, along with reliance on specialized transportation services, often restrict individuals with disabilities from fully participating in the workforce (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020; U.S. GAO, 2021). Lack of transportation options can undermine even the most well-planned transition efforts, as employees struggle to commute to job sites consistently (Curda & U.S. GAO, 2021). Research points to the importance of expanding public and specialized transportation services and advocating for policies that ensure transportation accessibility (Carter et al., 2018; Dague, 2012). Employers and policymakers must collaborate to address these issues, ensuring that individuals are not excluded from employment due to transportation challenges.

### **Reimagining Day Services to Support CIE and Community Inclusion**

Traditional day services for individuals with disabilities often focus on segregated, non-employment activities that do not adequately prepare them for integration into the competitive workforce. Research suggests that to promote CIE, day services must be restructured to prioritize employment-focused skill-building and community inclusion (Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment, 2016). Reimagining these services involves shifting from a custodial model to one that emphasizes ongoing support for meaningful employment. This transition requires not only staff retraining but also interagency cooperation to ensure that day programs align with CIE goals. By restructuring day services to focus on community engagement and competitive employment, agencies can better support individuals in achieving long-term employment success.

### **Engaging Communities and Encouraging Systems Change**

Community involvement is critical for fostering inclusive networks and creating sustainable pathways to CIE. Research indicates that successful transitions into competitive employment rely on strong community partnerships and collaborative efforts among service agencies, businesses, families, and policymakers (Butterworth et al., 2007; Sulewski et al., 2017). Systems change, driven by advocacy and policy reform, is needed to dismantle the structural barriers that limit access to CIE. Engaging local communities and stakeholders in these efforts not only promotes employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities but also facilitates broader societal inclusion. This collaborative approach is vital for ensuring that individuals with disabilities are fully integrated into the workforce and their communities.

## Advocating for Policy Change

Robust advocacy is essential to advancing policy reforms that promote equitable employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Outdated policies—such as the continuation of subminimum wage practices—pose significant barriers to achieving widespread CIE (ADA, 2008; *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 1999). Federal and state leadership must work to reform these policies and support initiatives that enable individuals with disabilities to transition from sheltered workshops into competitive employment settings (American Rescue Plan Act, 2021). Legal protections and inclusive employment practices, guided by advocacy efforts, should be prioritized to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to fair wages and employment rights (Disability Employment TA Center, n.d.; Grossi & Andresen, 2023). Additionally, legislative initiatives, such as those aimed at phasing out subminimum wages, must continue to be pursued to create a more inclusive and equitable labor market. Policymakers, service providers, and communities all play crucial roles in advancing these reforms, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can achieve meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes.

## Recommended Strategies

We found a range of strategies in the literature that support the successful transition of individuals with disabilities from sheltered workshops to CIE. These strategies emphasize the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, targeted training, and the removal of systemic barriers that hinder employment access. The table below provides a sample of these recommended strategies, with a focus on enhancing institutional support, promoting inclusive employment practices, and addressing individual and systemic challenges. The strategies include educating key stakeholders—such as agency staff, family members, and employers—while also advocating for legislative reforms and increased resource allocation. Implementing these strategies can promote more inclusive and equitable employment outcomes, ensuring that individuals with disabilities receive the necessary support to thrive in CIE settings. Additionally, advocacy efforts, ongoing benefits counseling, and the use of assistive technologies are essential components in this transformative process, ultimately driving change across multiple levels of society.

**Table 2. Recommended Strategies from the Literature Review**

Recommended Strategies	Key Focus Areas
<b>Coordinate stakeholder efforts.</b>	Foster collaboration among employers, service providers, policymakers, and families to align goals.
<b>Allocate resources for and enhance information dissemination.</b>	Increase public awareness and ensure accurate, accessible information is provided to all parties.
<b>Promote inclusive employer practices</b>	Encourage the adoption of inclusive hiring, training, and support practices across industries.
<b>Address agency staff knowledge gaps.</b>	Provide ongoing professional development for staff to ensure they understand CIE processes.

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Recommended Strategies	Key Focus Areas
<b>Provide cultural competence training.</b>	Equip staff and employers with the skills to address the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities.
<b>Integrate social identity theory.</b>	Incorporate an understanding of social identity into CIE planning to address biases and barriers.
<b>Enhance legislative action.</b>	Advocate for policy reforms that promote equitable access to employment opportunities.
<b>Combat learned stereotypes.</b>	Challenge and dismantle harmful stereotypes about individuals with disabilities in the workplace.
<b>Promote equal opportunities.</b>	Ensure fair and equal access to employment regardless of disability status.
<b>Address internalization of negative attitudes.</b>	Offer support to individuals with disabilities to overcome self-limiting beliefs.
<b>Facilitate natural support for transportation whenever possible.</b>	Provide training, resources, and coordination assistance.
<b>Provide support for transitioning from sheltered employment.</b>	Create tailored plans and supports to ease the transition to CIE from segregated environments for each agency and individual.
<b>Educate family members.</b>	Provide families with the resources and knowledge needed to support their loved ones' employment goals.
<b>Prioritize advanced skill development for 14(c) staff.</b> <b>Address barriers to transition, including resource reallocation.</b>	Ensure staff working in 14(c) programs receive the training needed to facilitate CIE transitions.
<b>Leverage legal decisions for informed choices.</b>	Use case law and policy rulings to guide and inform agency transition plans.
<b>Promote additional training and support for individuals transitioning from sheltered workshops.</b>	Enhance individualized training and mentorship programs.*
<b>Implement specialized training programs.</b>	Develop non-segregated programs tailored to the specific needs of individuals transitioning into CIE.
<b>Enhance vocational rehabilitation services.</b>	Expand and improve vocational rehabilitation services to meet the growing demand for CIE.
<b>Promote assistive technologies.</b>	Increase access to technologies that can support workplace integration and productivity.

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Recommended Strategies	Key Focus Areas
<b>Emphasize personalized assistance.</b>	Tailor support services to everyone’s unique needs and employment goals.
<b>Provide comprehensive benefits counseling.</b>	Ensure individuals and families receive accurate information about work incentives and benefits.
<b>Alleviate fear through education.</b>	Offer educational programs to address misconceptions about how employment affects benefits.
<b>Leverage Social Security Administration services.</b>	Use existing SSA programs, such as Ticket to Work, to support employment transitions.
<b>Address misinformation.</b>	Combat false information about CIE through targeted outreach and education campaigns.
<b>Ensure support service professionals' adherence to ethical principles.</b>	Certify that benefits counselors and support staff operate according to ethical standards.
<b>Promote certification for benefits counselors. Highlight work incentives.</b>	Encourage certification to ensure quality and ethical benefits counseling services.
<b>Conduct comprehensive safety assessments in CIE settings.</b>	Ensure that CIE environments are safe and meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.
<b>Highlight work incentives.</b>	Educate individuals on financial work incentives such as PASS and other SSA programs.
<b>Provide training to ensure respectful treatment of individuals with disabilities in CIE settings.</b>	Train employers and coworkers on appropriate workplace behavior and communication.
<b>Develop clear workplace behavior guidelines and communication strategies.</b>	Establish guidelines to foster respectful, inclusive communication in CIE workplaces.
<b>Establish mechanisms for reporting, addressing injuries, or mistreatment in CIE settings.</b>	Create clear processes for reporting and addressing any safety concerns or mistreatment.
<b>Provide informational sessions for individuals and families.</b>	Offer regular informational workshops to help families support individuals transitioning to CIE.
<b>Offer support programs for families to address long-term workplace support concerns.</b>	Create long-term support structures to ensure sustained success in CIE settings.
<b>Implement mentorship programs to avoid negative CIE experiences.</b>	Develop mentorship programs that provide guidance and support for individuals in new job roles.

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Recommended Strategies	Key Focus Areas
<b>Develop community transportation partnerships.</b>	Partner with local organizations to improve transportation options for CIE participants.
<b>Educate about transportation options and create guides.</b>	Provide resources on transportation services and options to individuals and families.
<b>Advocate for financial assistance programs for vehicle access.</b>	Promote financial programs that help individuals with disabilities purchase or modify vehicles.
<b>Promote Plan for Achieving Self-Sufficiency (PASS) development for transportation needs.</b>	Use PASS to help individuals with disabilities fund their transportation needs.
<b>Enhance specialized transportation services' availability, affordability, and logistics and flexibility.</b>	Advocate for expanded, affordable, and flexible transportation services for individuals with disabilities.
<b>Encourage CIE employers to provide transportation assurance.</b>	Urge employers to offer transportation assistance or flexible working hours to accommodate transportation needs.
<b>Raise awareness about family challenges in providing transportation.</b>	Address the burden placed on families in arranging transportation and offer alternative solutions.
<b>Advocate for policy changes addressing transportation barriers.</b>	Support legislative efforts to remove transportation-related barriers to employment.
<b>Facilitate natural support for transportation whenever possible.</b>	Encourage informal, community-based transportation networks to support individuals with disabilities.

The strategies outlined above in Table 2 highlight the multifaceted approach necessary to promote successful transitions from sheltered workshops to CIE. A central theme is the need for comprehensive collaboration among stakeholders, including service providers, employers, families, and policymakers. Resource allocation, specialized training, and inclusive employer practices are vital to creating supportive work environments that help fulfill the diverse needs of employees with disabilities. Additionally, addressing transportation barriers, ensuring safety in CIE settings, and providing robust benefits counseling are crucial elements of a successful transition. These strategies, drawn from extensive literature on employment for individuals with disabilities, provide a roadmap for creating a more inclusive workforce, fostering long-term success, and promoting equity in employment outcomes. By integrating these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to a system-wide change that benefits both individuals with disabilities and society at large.



## Summary of Interviews: Findings, Barriers, and Effective Strategies

During the 2023-2024 research period, our team interviewed 35 individuals with disabilities and their families about their experiences transitioning from sheltered work environments to jobs in the community. Below are the key findings regarding barriers, successes, and recommendations related to the transition to CIE.

### Key Findings from Individual Interviews

The researchers conducted and analyzed the interviews by identifying recurring themes, which were then compared with those found in the existing literature. The themes presented here are those consistently observed across both the interviews and the literature review. Below, we discuss several key themes that emerged prominently from the interviews.

#### Important Practices for Agencies

Several recurring themes from the interviews point to practices that, if adopted by service agencies, may lead to more successful outcomes for individuals transitioning to CIE. These practices include:

##### Constructing a Meaningful Week

One significant challenge for individuals transitioning from sheltered workshops to CIE is the shift from a structured environment to a more flexible schedule, where they often work part-time or less. Sheltered workshops previously provided a consistent daily routine, whereas CIE may involve fewer hours. Agencies should support individuals in creating a meaningful weekly schedule that reflects their interests, strengths, and aspirations. This could include employment, classes, recreational activities, social experiences, self-care, and other self-directed pursuits. By helping individuals structure their week holistically, agencies can foster an environment conducive to sustained employment success.

##### Using Person-Centered Discovery

Person-centered Discovery is a crucial practice in both creating a meaningful week and identifying an individual's employment interests and strengths. This approach tailors the job search and employment experience to each person's preferences, improving job satisfaction and overall success. By focusing on individual goals and strengths, agencies can ensure that individuals find roles that align with their personal values and capacities, leading to more successful job placements.

##### Facilitating Parent Support Networks

Transitioning to CIE not only affects the individuals themselves but also their families. Agencies that facilitate parent support networks can provide families with the resources and confidence needed to embrace CIE. These networks can offer emotional support, share success stories, and address concerns about the transition away from sheltered workshops. When families are empowered to support their loved ones, the likelihood of a successful transition increases.

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### Promoting Job Satisfaction by Encouraging Perseverance

Employment transitions often come with challenges, and individuals need support to persist in their new roles despite these obstacles. Agencies should prioritize fostering perseverance by encouraging individuals to stay engaged, providing ongoing support, and helping them navigate difficulties. Promoting resilience through regular check-ins and constructive feedback can enhance long-term job satisfaction and retention.

### Ensuring Positive Job Fit

Ensuring a positive job fit is vital for sustained success in CIE. When agencies use person-centered Discovery, they can better match individuals with roles that suit their abilities and preferences. This practice reduces turnover, improves job performance, and leads to more fulfilling employment experiences. A well-aligned job fit can also reinforce perseverance and job satisfaction, as individuals are more likely to thrive in roles that match their unique skills and interests.

By adopting these practices, agencies can play a pivotal role in making the transition to CIE smoother and more successful for individuals. These strategies not only address the practical aspects of employment but also support the emotional and social needs of individuals and their families during the transition process.

### Successes and Positive Outcomes of CIE

Interviews with individuals who transitioned to CIE revealed several key themes associated with success and positive outcomes. Categorized as attributes contributing to successful outcomes, multiple interviewees specifically mentioned the importance of the following:

#### Comprehensive Support Services and Parental Advocacy

These two recurring themes were highlighted by many interviewees as vital to successful transitions. Comprehensive services provide individuals with the resources they need to participate in CIE, while parental advocacy ensures that families feel included in the decision-making process. Interviewees noted that when agencies embraced parental involvement, it led to stronger support systems and greater acceptance of CIE transitions by families.

#### Advantages of CIE

Interviewees consistently discussed the advantages of CIE, including increased income, personal fulfillment, job satisfaction, and alignment with individual preferences. They reported that CIE promotes wellbeing, and many individuals reported higher levels of job satisfaction and a sense of personal accomplishment.

#### Social Relationships in CIE

Social relationships were another critical theme. Many individuals described forming positive peer relationships at work, which they viewed as essential for job success. Interviewees

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frequently mentioned support from both colleagues and supervisors as a factor that contributed to maintaining employment and job satisfaction.

### **Dynamic Nature of Job Placement**

Interviewees often emphasized the dynamic nature of job placement. Several explained that they had tried multiple jobs before settling into their preferred roles. This exploration process allowed them to develop new skills, build confidence, and refine their employment goals. For some, their current job was a step toward future employment goals, such as pursuing additional education, while others found long-term fulfillment in their current roles.

### **Job Coaching and Employment Specialists**

Interviewees also pointed to job coaching as critical for CIE success. They described how job coaches initially provided daily support and gradually reduced their presence as individuals gained confidence and independence. Employment specialists played a key role by asking about job preferences, helping individuals explore different roles, and setting future goals. These specialists helped individuals learn new skills, resolve workplace challenges, and adjust to their job environments.

### **Person-Centered Planning**

Person-centered planning emerged as another important theme. This process ensured that employment was tailored to individual needs, preferences, and aspirations. It allowed for meaningful job development and placement, enhancing job satisfaction and long-term success.

### **Customization and Individualization**

Customizing job roles based on individual strengths through person-centered processes increased employment success.

### **Informed Choice and Readiness**

Exposure to various job options and environments, along with opportunities to build self-advocacy skills, helped job seekers make informed decisions and prepare for CIE.

### **Inclusion of Natural Supports**

As job seekers gained experience, natural supports from coworkers and supervisors were gradually introduced, enhancing job satisfaction, and promoting social integration.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation and Waiver Services**

Many individuals benefited from VR and waiver services, which provided job coaching, transportation, personal care assistance, and other critical supports. These services helped individuals navigate the job discovery process and transition smoothly into CIE.

All the themes identified—comprehensive support services, parental advocacy, social relationships, job coaching, and person-centered planning—play a pivotal role in ensuring successful transitions to CIE.

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The involvement of employment specialists and the customization of roles based on individual needs further contribute to positive outcomes. By embracing these practices and supports, agencies can empower individuals to achieve long-term success and fulfillment in CIE.

### Barriers to CIE

While interviewees highlighted many positive aspects of CIE, they also identified several barriers encountered during the transition from sheltered work to CIE. These barriers fell into the following themes:

#### Living Arrangements and Support Systems

Many participants reported that limited access to adequate support networks hindered their transition to CIE. Some individuals struggled to build independence and self-advocacy skills due to living arrangements that did not promote these qualities, creating obstacles to securing and maintaining employment.

#### Transportation Challenges

Transportation issues were frequently cited as a significant barrier. Interviewees discussed limited public transit options, high transportation costs, and reliance on family members for commuting. These factors restricted job seekers' mobility and, in turn, their ability to obtain or sustain CIE opportunities.

#### Drawbacks of Sheltered Work

Several interviewees viewed their experiences in sheltered workshops as a barrier to CIE. Tasks in sheltered environments were often unchallenging and did not align with individuals' skills or preferences. This lack of fulfillment and personal growth left many dissatisfied and unprepared for the transition to CIE, especially when they remained in sheltered settings for extended periods.

#### Fear and Safety Concerns

Fear of transitioning to CIE was a common concern. Some individuals expressed anxiety about the potential for embarrassment or personal safety issues in both sheltered workshops and new community-based employment settings. This fear sometimes deterred individuals from pursuing CIE opportunities.

#### Training and Knowledge Gaps

Interviewees identified a lack of adequate training and awareness among stakeholders—whether job seekers, family members, or service providers—as a barrier. Gaps in understanding customized employment, transportation options, and the benefits system hindered the effective support necessary for a successful transition. These training gaps limited the ability to fully explore and embrace CIE opportunities.

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### Parental Perspectives

Parental attitudes toward CIE varied. While some parents advocated for meaningful employment opportunities, others were more apprehensive, voicing concerns about safety, guardianship, and whether CIE was the best option for their family members. This apprehension influenced decisions and often led to hesitancy.

### Static Employment Placements

Some participants discussed the issue of static employment placements—jobs that were not aligned with their personal interests, skills, or growth potential. Initial placements sometimes lacked opportunities for advancement or skill development, resulting in limited professional progress. They viewed the absence of career growth in CIE as a hindrance, especially for those seeking long-term fulfillment or advancement in their employment.

### Agency-Related Barriers

Interviewees frequently cited agency-related challenges, including poor planning and a lack of focus on person-centered approaches. They noted that agencies often prioritized convenience over individualized goals, failing to provide proper communication or follow-through with job seekers and their employers. Inadequate coordination between agencies and service providers created obstacles that hampered individuals' transitions to CIE.

### Negative Attitudes and Expectations

Negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities were another significant barrier. Low expectations or a deficit-based view of people with disabilities, held by agencies or other stakeholders, contributed to reluctance in supporting CIE. This mindset limited opportunities and diminished motivation for both job seekers and those responsible for facilitating their transition.

### Lack of Knowledge and Use of Assistive Technology

A lack of knowledge about assistive technology also limited job success. Interviewees noted that assistive technology could enhance both job opportunities and job performance. However, insufficient access to this technology, coupled with inadequate training in its use, diminished the effectiveness of CIE efforts. Stakeholders must be informed about the potential of assistive technology to ensure individuals can reach their full potential in the workplace.

### Misconceptions and Misinformation

Misinformation about Social Security benefits and how employment impacts eligibility was a recurring theme. Many job seekers feared that pursuing CIE could jeopardize their benefits, leading to anxiety and confusion. This misunderstanding created hesitancy in seeking employment and hampered individuals' willingness to fully engage in CIE.

Addressing the barriers identified—transportation, agency-related issues, misconceptions, and lack of support systems—is critical for ensuring the successful transition to CIE. By providing adequate training, improving communication, fostering positive attitudes, and increasing access to assistive technology,

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stakeholders can help remove these obstacles and promote more successful and meaningful employment outcomes for individuals transitioning to CIE.

### Strategies for Successful Transitioning to CIE

The following themes emerged as essential strategies for supporting successful transitions to CIE.

#### Coordination and Resource Allocation

Effective coordination between stakeholders and proper resource allocation are foundational for successful transitions to CIE. Agencies such as VR and waiver service providers must collaborate closely to meet individual employment needs. In some cases, reallocating resources may be necessary to ensure that all workers receive the support required to thrive in CIE. This collaboration extends beyond agencies to include employers, ensuring that the workplace environment is prepared to support inclusive practices. Agencies should prioritize training their staff on how to implement and advocate for these inclusive practices, which are critical to ensuring that individuals with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities.

#### Inclusive Practices

Creating and maintaining inclusive workplace environments is a key strategy for ensuring the success of individuals transitioning to CIE. Agencies should actively seek out employers who embrace diversity and foster an inclusive culture. Inclusive practices benefit not only the individuals transitioning into the workforce but also the businesses, by promoting a diverse and dynamic workforce. For CIE to be successful, inclusive practices must be a central focus at both the agency and employer levels.

#### Education and Training

Comprehensive education and training are vital for all stakeholders involved in the transition process, including individuals, families, employers, and service providers. Training should cover a range of topics, such as systemic changes needed within agencies, person-centered planning, customized employment, and skill development techniques. Additionally, staff should be trained in fostering positive relationships with employers and other stakeholders to create a more collaborative environment. This will ensure that all parties are prepared to support the individual's employment journey.

#### Cultural Competencies

Building cultural competence—particularly around marginalized populations such as individuals with disabilities—is critical in fostering inclusive and supportive environments. By understanding the cultural contexts and challenges faced by these populations, agencies and employers can create more meaningful and tailored employment opportunities. This not only enhances the individual's experience but also improves the overall success of CIE transitions.

### **Legislation and Policy Advocacy**

Systemic change often begins with advocacy at the policy and legislative levels. By pushing for changes in policies and laws that affect employment for people with disabilities, agencies can challenge stereotypes and improve employment outcomes. Advocacy efforts should also focus on removing systemic barriers and creating frameworks that support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

### **Supportive Community Partnerships**

Building strong partnerships with community organizations and businesses is essential in supporting individuals transitioning to CIE. These partnerships can provide access to critical resources such as transportation, meaningful employment opportunities, and a network of support that helps individuals build a balanced and fulfilling schedule. Community partnerships enhance the overall support system, especially as agencies move away from sheltered work models toward more integrated employment opportunities.

### **Financial Assistance Programs**

Access to financial assistance programs is a key strategy for overcoming barriers to employment. Financial support can help individuals access transportation, assistive technology, and other resources that are vital for successful CIE transitions. Agencies should actively assist individuals in navigating and utilizing these programs to remove financial barriers and promote greater independence.

### **Enhanced Employment Engagement**

Engaging employers in the CIE process is critical. Agencies should work to educate employers on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and on how inclusive workforces contribute to business success. By fostering a deeper understanding of the advantages of CIE, agencies can encourage greater employer involvement and commitment to providing meaningful job opportunities.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms**

Monitoring and evaluating the success of CIE initiatives is essential for ensuring continuous improvement and accountability. Agencies should implement mechanisms to track the effectiveness of their programs, assess outcomes for individuals transitioning to CIE, and identify areas for improvement. Regular evaluation ensures that services remain responsive to the needs of individuals and continue to support successful employment outcomes.

### **Development of Specialized Training Programs**

Specialized training programs tailored to address skill gaps are crucial for both individuals seeking employment and agency staff. These programs should focus on building the specific skills necessary for individuals to succeed in competitive employment and ensure that staff are

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well-equipped to support them. Offering ongoing training opportunities ensures that both individuals and agencies continue to grow and adapt to changing employment landscapes.

Implementing these strategies—coordination, inclusive practices, education, cultural competence, policy advocacy, community partnerships, financial support, employer engagement, monitoring, and specialized training—is critical for promoting successful transitions to CIE. By fostering collaboration, enhancing skills, and advocating for systemic change, stakeholders can remove barriers and create pathways to meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities.

Our analysis revealed a strong alignment between the themes identified in the interviews and those from the literature, as outlined in the summaries and tables in the literature review and findings sections. By addressing the identified barriers and integrating key insights from both sources, and by implementing the recommended strategies, we can significantly enhance the transition from sheltered workshops to CIE. This will foster a more inclusive and supportive employment environment for individuals with disabilities, ultimately expanding their employment opportunities across Indiana.

**Table 3. Summary of Key Findings, Barriers and Strategies to CIE from Interviews with Individuals, Families, and Support Providers**

Barriers from Interviews	Important Components of Each Barrier
<p><b>Key Findings from Individual Interviews</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Constructing a Meaningful Week</li> <li>● Significance of Person-Centered Discovery</li> <li>● Parental Support Networks</li> <li>● Job Satisfaction Despite Challenges</li> <li>● Importance of Job Fit</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Findings of Successes and Positive Outcomes of CIE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dynamic Nature of Job Placement</li> <li>● Critical Role of Job Coaching</li> <li>● Social Relationship in CIE</li> <li>● Advantages of CIE</li> <li>● Customization and Individualization</li> <li>● Informed Choice and Readiness</li> <li>● Comprehensive Support Services</li> <li>● Parental Advocacy</li> <li>● Person-Centered Planning</li> <li>● Effective Employment Specialist Qualities</li> <li>● Inclusion of Natural Supports</li> <li>● VR and Waiver Services</li> </ul>



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Barriers from Interviews	Important Components of Each Barrier
<b>Findings of Additional Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fear of CIE</li> <li>● Dignity of Risk and Parental Trust</li> <li>● Self-Advocacy and Empowerment</li> <li>● Combating Negative Attitudes</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers to CIE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Living Arrangements and Support Systems</li> <li>● Transportation Challenges</li> <li>● Drawbacks of Sheltered Work</li> <li>● Fear and Safety Concerns</li> <li>● Training and Knowledge Gaps</li> <li>● Parental Perspectives</li> <li>● Static Employment Placement</li> <li>● Agency-Related Barriers</li> <li>● Negative Attitudes and Expectations</li> <li>● Lack of Knowledge and Use of Assistive Technology</li> <li>● Misconceptions and Misinformation</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies for Successful Transitioning to CIE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coordination and Resource Allocation</li> <li>● Inclusive Practices</li> <li>● Education and Training</li> <li>● Cultural Competence</li> <li>● Legislation and Policy Advocacy</li> <li>● Supportive Community</li> <li>● Financial Assistance Programs</li> <li>● Enhanced Employer Engagement</li> <li>● Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms</li> <li>● Development of Specialized Training Programs</li> </ul>

## Policy Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Medicaid Waiver System

One of the purposes of this research project was to find barriers and strategies that could then be used to inform policy change recommendations and systemic changes in Indiana, especially within the Indiana Medicaid waiver system, so people with disabilities who receive waiver services are better able to gain and maintain employment. In Indiana, the Medicaid waiver system plays a crucial role in supporting individuals with disabilities by providing funding for services and supports that help them live more

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independently and participate fully in their communities (Grossi & Andresen, 2023, Winsor et al., 2019; Wohl, 2015). Indiana offers several Medicaid waivers specifically designed to support individuals with diverse disabilities (Grossi & Andresen, 2023). These waivers include the Aged and Disabled Waiver (A&D), the Family Supports Waiver (FSW), the Community Integration and Habilitation Waiver (CIH), and the Community Integration and Habilitation Waiver for Individuals with Brain Injury (The ARC of Indiana, 2024). Indiana Medicaid waiver services can include a wide range of supports tailored to an individual's needs. These may include personal care assistance, respite care for caregivers, assistive technology, behavioral supports, community integration services, supported employment, and more.

The Indiana Medicaid waiver system plays a vital role in supporting individuals with disabilities to live more independently, participate in their communities, and access the services and supports they need to thrive (Grossi & Andresen, 2023; The ARC of Indiana, 2024). Through a combination of federal and state funding, individualized planning, and a network of service providers, individuals with disabilities can receive the support they need to lead fulfilling lives in their communities.

The following waiver recommendations are meant to address barriers and challenges that individuals and their families are experiencing as they transition out of sheltered workshop employment and into CIE.

**Table 4. Table of Medicaid Waiver Recommendations for Indiana**

Recommendations	Explanation of Recommendation
<b>Benefits Counseling</b>	Concerns about the potential impact on benefits, including eligibility for public assistance like Supplemental Security Income (SSI), often deter individuals and families from seeking CIE because of a lack of accurate information. Fear of losing benefits, coupled with a lack of awareness about available supports, contributes to incomplete understanding and decision making. To address these challenges, it's crucial to expand the availability of benefits counseling and raise awareness among individuals attending 14(c) programs (Kaya et al., 2023; National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019; Tremblay et al., 2006; Wehman, 2023). We can achieve this by requiring that designated staff from 14(c) programs become certified Benefits Information Network (BIN) liaisons and by conducting benefits analyses for priority groups of individuals considering CIE. The results of these analyses should be shared and discussed with the individuals and their families or guardians to facilitate informed decision-making.

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<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Explanation of Recommendation</b>
<b>Regional Peer Support Network</b>	<p>Development of regional peer support networks for both individuals and families transitioning to CIE can provide valuable guidance and assistance (Bailie &amp; Tickle, 2015; Joo, J. H., et al., 2022; Kaehne &amp; Beyer, 2013; National Association of Peer Supporters, 2019). These networks, aligned with the Employment First philosophy, can offer support, promote self-advocacy, and ensure informed choice throughout the transition process. Networks, overseen by managers, should include groups for individuals with disabilities, their families, and 14(c) staff.</p>
<b>Enhance Messaging and Awareness</b>	<p>To enhance messaging and awareness, it's essential to regularly provide trainings, such as Family Employment Awareness Training, and ensure the quality and consistency of information delivery (Gross, et al., 2021). By implementing these strategies, states can better support individuals and families in making informed decisions about transitioning from 14(c) programs to CIE, ultimately promoting independence and a good quality of life.</p>
<b>Enhance Access to Foundational Training for Individuals, Families and Other Stakeholders</b>	<p>Navigating the transition to CIE poses significant challenges for individuals with disabilities, their families, community rehabilitation provider staff, and employers. A key hurdle is the lack of awareness and knowledge gaps surrounding CIE, leaving stakeholders ill-equipped to make informed decisions (Gross et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2018; Meltzer et al., 2018; Wehman et al., 2020). Addressing this issue demands coordinated efforts from various stakeholders, including VR, educators, community rehabilitation provider staff, and state leadership (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2020; U.S. GAO, 2021). Indiana has the expertise and resources to influence individuals and families positively toward person-centered outcomes, including CIE (The ARC of Indiana, 2024). State initiatives such as using the LifeCourse Framework and the Statewide Transition Plan for Compliance with Home and Community-Based Services Final Rule (2022) underscore the state's commitment to empowerment and support resources (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 2022; LifeCourse Nexus Training and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).</p>

**Recommendations for Enhancing Training Access for Stakeholders**

Ensuring that all stakeholders have access to enhanced training related to any Medicaid Waiver recommendations that are adopted is vital for consistency of implementation of systemic changes. To support this need for enhanced training related to Medicaid recommendations, we created a list of important steps to make sure stakeholders obtain the training they need.

**Table 5. Recommendations for Enhancing Training Access for Stakeholders**

Recommendation	Explanation of Recommendation
<b>Codify Provider Qualifications</b>	Establish clear guidelines to ensure families and caregivers have access to a wide range of training options (Provider Qualifications, 2024).
<b>Develop Online Training Repository</b>	Create a comprehensive online training platform hosted on the Family and Social Services Administration website. This resource, funded by the state, will offer free training to all Indiana residents. These trainings can help the state disseminate new information about new and existing programs, assist families and individual as they learn how to use their waiver budgets, and enhance access to services and supports (Kuo et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2012; Winsor et al., 2023)
<b>Implement Case Management Improvement</b>	Enhance case management services to ensure effective implementation of person-centered individual support plans (IN.gov & Indiana Family and Social Service Administration, 2024; Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 2022; LifeCourse Nexus Training and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.). Monitoring teams will assess goal achievement and provide feedback for ongoing improvement.
<b>Professional Development for Case Managers</b>	Mandate completion of accredited Employment Services Training (EST) or Employment Services Training with Customized Employment (ESTCE) courses for case managers (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2024). Certification in the LifeCourse Framework will also be required to ensure proficiency in person-centered planning (LifeCourse Nexus Training and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).
<b>BIN Liaison Certification</b>	Require case management agencies to designate staff for BIN liaison certification to provide accurate benefits information and minimize misinformation (Kaya, et al., 2023; National Training and Data Center at Virginia Commonwealth

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Recommendation	Explanation of Recommendation
	University, 2023; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019; Tremblay et al., 2006; Wehman, 2023).
<b>Introduce ‘Pathfinder’ Services</b>	Create a waiver-funded service called “Pathfinder” to bridge the gap between individuals’ Person-Centered Individualized Support Plans and real-life implementation of these plans (Indiana Family & Social Service Administration et al., 2018; Indiana Family and Social Service Administration, 2022; LifeCourse Nexus Training and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.). Pathfinder will facilitate connections between families, case managers, and community resources, promoting person-centered actualization.
<b>Service Definition Revision</b>	Clarify the responsibilities, goals, and expectations of case management roles to align with the state's vision for person-centered planning and support (Indiana Family and Social Service Administration, 2022; The ARC of Indiana, 2024; LifeCourse Nexus Training and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

By formalizing access to foundational training and enhancing case management services, Indiana can empower individuals and families to navigate the transition to CIE effectively, fostering independence, self-advocacy, and community integration.

### Dedicated Funding Shift

Indiana’s Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services is leveraging American Rescue Plan Act (2021) funding to propel a vital transition from sheltered work to CIE for individuals with disabilities (American Rescue Plan Act, 2021). This strategic shift is underpinned by methodical assessment, provider assistance, and statewide transformation efforts, setting the stage for a profound evolution in disability services (Butterworth et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2018; Henn & Henn, 2007; Luecking & Mank, 2022).

To ensure the success of this transition, adequate and sustainable funding allocation is paramount. Indiana has taken proactive steps in this direction, offering enhanced outcomes payments and transformation grants. However, further funding reallocation or generation is essential to adequately support agency and staff transformation long term. Agencies need robust support and guidance to embrace alternative business models conducive to solvency and sustainability. State-subsidized funding for competency development and training of 14(c) staff is crucial. Specific development and education includes Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators-endorsed Employment Consultant Training (ECT) and Discovery training, and exposure to best practices.

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Addressing funding issues is imperative to mitigate staff reluctance in providing CIE-focused services (Curda & U.S. GOA, 2021). Transitioning individuals from sheltered employment to CIE mandates a reshaping of agency services, emphasizing a person-centered approach and adaptable program practices. (Avellone et al., 2023; Boeltzig-Brown & ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston, 2017; Isvan, et al, 2023; Lyons et al., 2022; Nettles, 2013; Rogan & Rinne, 2011; Timmons et al., 2019). Without sufficient funding, this transformative endeavor cannot reach its full potential.

Indiana's pioneering stance in favor of integrated settings and employment services, including the decision to phase out 14(c) admissions by 2027, positions Indiana as a national leader (State of Indiana & Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 2024). To capitalize on this momentum, the state should consider several key funding strategies.

- 1. Competency Development for Staff:** Provide resources for 14(c) staff to develop foundational competencies essential for supporting individuals in attaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.
- 2. Employment Consultant Training:** Facilitate completion of an Employment Consultant Training course focused on customized employment to equip staff with the necessary skills for personalized employment solutions.
- 3. Person-Centered Employment Exploration:** Ensure completion of a foundational Discovery course to foster a person-centered approach to employment exploration, introducing staff to job coaching fundamentals.
- 4. Job Development Training:** Engage staff with job development training materials and videos from experts like Denise Bissonnette to enhance networking and job negotiation skills, crucial for achieving CIE outcomes.
- 5. Regionally Designated VR Personnel:** Allocate VR personnel specialists regionally to provide VR 101 training to 14(c) staff contributing to CIE facilitation, focusing on Discovery-related material and individualized profiles.
- 6. Feedback Mechanisms:** Implement a process for providing feedback to 14(c) staff as they complete Discovery in an individualized fashion, ensuring continuous improvement.
- 7. Quality Indicator Checklist:** Develop a quality indicator checklist to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of CIE facilitation efforts, ensuring adherence to best practices.

By strategically shifting funds towards CE and supported employment services and integrated employment outcomes, Indiana can further advance its commitment to inclusivity and empowerment for individuals with disabilities, fostering a more equitable and vibrant workforce landscape.

### Improving Transportation Options

Transitioning from sheltered work to CIE presents significant transportation challenges for individuals with disabilities, impacting their ability to sustain employment. Many face obstacles in securing a vehicle operator's license and lack the financial means to purchase a vehicle (Curda & U.S. GOA, 2021; U.S.

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Commission on Civil Rights, 2020). While specialized transportation services offer an alternative, its availability, costs, and logistical considerations vary by community, making reliance on them less palatable (Carter et al., 2018).

Indiana waiver regulations allow transportation to non-medical destinations as a reimbursed activity if reflected in the Person-Centered Individual Support Plan and provided by a residential or habilitation provider (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 2022). However, reimbursement is limited to two one-way trips per day, and documentation standards are stringent, hindering flexibility and spontaneity in transportation planning. It is important that Medicaid waiver recommendations and changes focused on increasing CIE for people with diverse disabilities include recommendations that will improve transportation access, as transportation to and from work is a service every person who desires CIE will need. Some recommendations about the Indiana waiver and transportation are listed below.

- 1. Allow Natural Supports for Transportation:** Permit waiver participants to use transportation funding for natural supports, providing flexibility and creativity in the use of waiver funds. This approach circumvents issues with specialized transportation and aligns with the concept of natural/unpaid support as an alternative funding stream.
- 2. Implement Consumer-Directed Options:** Introduce a consumer-directed option for waivers to empower individuals to make personalized decisions regarding transportation options (as well as other services). This allows for greater control over budget allocation and enhances individual choice and autonomy.
- 3. Redirect Budgeted Funds for Training:** Enable consumers to redirect or reallocate budgeted funds from Family and Caregiver Training to supplement transportation funding shortages (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 2022). This ensures that individuals have adequate resources to meet their transportation needs.

By implementing these recommendations, Indiana can enhance transportation options for individuals with disabilities, promoting greater independence, flexibility, community integration, and access to CIE.

### Improving Access to Quality Customized Employment Services

In the past, the 14(c) program has provided sheltered employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. However, transitioning individuals from sheltered to CIE requires a more advanced skill set than typically found among 14(c) staff (Cassidy et al., n.d.; Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.). Successful customized employment strategies demand proficiency in systematic instructional techniques, workplace assessments, job negotiation, and other specialized competencies (American Rescue Plan Act, 2021; National Disability Rights Network, 2011; Remund et al., 2022; Wehman et al., 2017). Because of this need for proficiency in customized employment, we are providing specific recommendations since customized employment practices need fidelity to be the most successful.

**Table 6. Recommendations to Improve Access to Quality Customized Employment Services**

Recommendations	Explanation of Recommendations
<b>Enhance Training and Expertise</b>	Recognize the additional training costs associated with developing customized employment skills and competencies (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 2022). Indiana should incentivize Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation payments for agencies achieving customized competencies and outcomes. This includes establishing agreed-upon competency-based certifications and enhanced reimbursement rates for agencies demonstrating proficiency in customized employment (U.S. GOA, 2021).
<b>Create Two-Tiered Reimbursement</b>	Implement a two-tiered reimbursement system for extended services, providing higher rates for customized employment outcomes. This incentivizes agencies to prioritize customized employment and invest in staff training and expertise (U.S. GOA, 2021).
<b>Streamline Waiver Entry Process</b>	Simplify the entry process into the Family Supports Waiver (FSW) or Community Integration and Habilitation (CIH) for individuals transitioning from 14(c) employment (U.S. GOA, 2021).
<b>Expand Remote Supports</b>	Extend waiver-funded remote support options for workplace and community integration (U.S. GOA, 2021). Remote support should focus on enhancing individuals' capacity for engagement and successful maintenance of valued social roles, complementing existing Personal Emergency Response System services.
<b>Implement Participant-Directed Options</b>	Introduce Participant-Directed Goods and Services for FSW and CIH waivers, empowering individuals to control and direct their services (U.S. GOA, 2021). This aligns with Indiana's goal of increasing individual autonomy and choice in waiver services.
<b>Enhance Day Habilitation Services</b>	Reimagine day habilitation services to support individuals' employment goals and community integration (Sulewski et al., 2017; U.S. GOA, 2021). This includes adding career exploration activities, providing instruction in workplace skills, and restructuring day



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Recommendations	Explanation of Recommendations
	services to promote competitive and integrated employment.
<b>Offer Long-Term Estate Planning Services</b>	Provide a one-time, waiver-funded service for long-term estate planning to assist families in securing the future well-being of individuals with disabilities (U.S. GAO, 2021). Specialized legal assistance in estate planning is essential for families to navigate complex planning options effectively to ensure the ongoing employment and stability of an individual when their primary caregiver passes which supports CIE by ensuring it can continue no matter of circumstances.

By implementing these recommendations, Indiana can expand access to quality, customized employment services; promote greater independence and inclusion for individuals with disabilities; and support their long-term financial security and well-being.

## Conclusion

Historically, individuals with disabilities have faced significant barriers to employment, with many being excluded from CIE opportunities (National Disability Rights Network, 2011). Those with more significant disabilities were often segregated into sheltered workshops, where they were isolated from their communities and denied the chance to engage in meaningful employment alongside their peers. CIE offers not only the potential for personal fulfillment and purpose but also access to a diverse group of peers and inclusive workplace environments (Avellone et al., 2023). Recognizing these long-standing inequalities, many states, including Indiana, have adopted Employment First policies to prioritize CIE as a primary goal for individuals with disabilities.

The passage of WIOA in 2014 introduced critical legal mandates for states to phase out the use of Section 14(c) certificates, which allowed sheltered workshops to pay individuals with disabilities subminimum wages. These policies have redirected funding away from segregated work settings and toward initiatives that support the transition to CIE. In line with these national trends, Indiana has embraced Employment First practices and committed resources from ARPA of 2021 to assist sheltered workshops in transitioning to CIE (American Rescue Plan Act, 2021). This shift is expected to significantly expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities across the state.

As part of these efforts, Indiana’s Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services has supported this research project to identify the barriers and best practices for facilitating the transition from sheltered workshops to CIE. The findings from this project, drawn from both a comprehensive review of the literature and interviews with individuals with disabilities and their families, revealed several key

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obstacles, including a lack of education about CIE for stakeholders, financial concerns, challenges in collaborating with Indiana VR, and the need for individualized, person-centered planning.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following actions:

- 1. Enhance Education and Training:** Ensure that agencies, service providers, and stakeholders are well-versed in customized employment, supported employment, and person-centered planning. Comprehensive education will foster a deeper understanding of CIE's benefits and processes.
- 2. Leverage Medicaid Waivers for Transportation:** Use Medicaid waivers to provide individuals with disabilities reliable access to transportation for their jobs, which is essential for sustaining employment in community settings.
- 3. Expand Access to Benefits Counseling:** Ensure that individuals with disabilities receive ongoing, informed benefits counseling from well-trained professionals, which will help them navigate complex financial and employment-related decisions without risking essential benefits.

Education, continuous access to accurate benefits information, and stakeholder collaboration are critical for facilitating successful transitions from sheltered workshops to CIE. Moreover, advocacy at local, state, and national levels is essential to driving lasting change and improving employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities. By embracing person-centered planning, CIE, and inclusive community services, stakeholders can help create a more equitable, inclusive, and supportive employment environment.

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