

Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Systems Change Project

Developed by the Lewin Group, June 2020

DC Learners and Earners (DC L&E)



The District of Columbia (DC) Department on Disability Services (DDS) was awarded the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) grant in September 2016 to lead DC L&E and promote competitive, integrated employment (CIE) for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Project Goals and Vision

Goal #1: Create a DC L&E consortium

Incorporated DC L&E initiatives into existing agencies

In 2016, DC L&E established a consortium, which is a collaboration of DC L&E staff and existing employment-related and stakeholder groups, including the Employment First Leadership Council, Project ACTION!, Supporting Families Community of Practice, and Secondary Transition Community of Practice, among others. Project staff attend meetings of more than 15 groups to present on DC L&E and receive feedback or input on past or future activities. By attending other meetings, DC L&E is increasing their audience and stakeholder engagement, and incorporating DC L&E initiatives into existing agencies and partner activities.

Goal #2: Create a cross-agency, cross-system Employment First culture

Promoted Employment First through capacity building trainings

From 2017 through 2020, DC L&E staff coordinated seven trainings on Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) competencies to promote Employment First. The trainings focused on job development, Discovery, and Customized Employment. As of February 2020, 28 participants completed all requirements to become ACRE trainers in DC, and continue to be supported by project staff. DC L&E staff are also working on the development of a DC-specific curriculum, which would enable DDS to issue its own ACRE certificates.

Highlighted Activities

- Supported State as Model Employer activities within the DC government (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)
- Supported the passage of a waiver renewal application and Statewide Transition Plan to promote employment outcomes (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)

Goal #3: Implement integrated, coordinated, and culturally competent parent/family engagement

Highlighted Activities

- Planned a Transition Workshop for youth, family members and self-advocates (2018, 2019)
- Held policy briefings with families (2017, 2018, 2019)

Increased family engagement and expectations

DC L&E staff hosted quarterly Supporting Families Community of Practice (CoP) meetings, which are often focused on employment and use Charting the LifeCourse tools, to raise expectations on employment, brainstorm options for Customized Employment, and develop materials such as an Advocacy Guide to help families advocate for systems change and understand employment supports. The meetings give staff face time with family members and individuals with I/DD to receive input on project activities. DC L&E staff also coordinated the first annual Latinx Conference in fall 2019 to engage with and assess the needs of the Latinx disability community.

Goal #4: Build cross-system expertise in best practices in job development, Customized Employment, job placement, and retention strategies

Promoted self-advocacy and employment

In addition to ACRE training, DC L&E trained 87 youth/young adults with I/DD through People Planning Together for Employment (PSTE). The PSTE curriculum promotes self-advocacy, group discovery, and employment for youth/young adults with I/DD. Using this curriculum, DC L&E created three pilot sites at three Employment Readiness programs, one at DC's Summer Youth Employment Program, one at a charter school, and one at a DC public school, all for youth with significant disabilities using trainers with disabilities. The DC L&E team plans to expand the PSTE training into DC Public Schools middle schools.

Highlighted Activities

- Created the [Direct Support Professionals \(DSP\) Academy](#) to train direct service providers, including youth with and without I/DD (2019, 2020)
- Began planning to make DC a Technology First state and developed an inclusive technology curriculum to improve opportunities for people with I/DD to enter the technology field (2020)

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Goal #5: Build on the LifeCourse Framework to create a framework for identifying potential members of natural support networks

Created sustainable LifeCourse Framework materials for DC

In 2017, DC L&E staff developed an [Employment and Discovery Toolkit](#), which is the DC version of the *Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC): Daily Life and Employment Guide*. The Guide is for self-advocates and families to enable transition age youth with I/DD to engage in employment planning and better prepare themselves to discuss employment preferences and requirements. It also includes activities and resources on employment exploration, continuing education for adults, and DC-specific success stories. DC L&E also developed a LifeCourse Trajectory that reflects youth with I/DD's experiences gaining employment and details events throughout the lifespan that can lead to employment.

Highlighted Activities

- Created and presented an Integrated Support Star to families, which helps students identify supports and interest areas through CtLC (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)
- Created a Discovery and Planning CtLC toolkit for individuals with I/DD, families, and professionals focused on planning for employment (2017, 2018)

Goal #6: Expand access throughout DC to information and support to promote economic self-sufficiency and remove barriers to employment related to public benefits

Expanded awareness of employment supports through stakeholder engagement

DC L&E staff organized and held a World Café in 2018 and 2019 for DC agencies, youth and young adults with I/DD, self-advocates, and family members. Attendees engaged in discussions on employment-related topics and DC L&E staff created reports to compile the strategic plan recommendations discussed during the World Cafés, as well as five videos that are included on [the DDS website](#). DC L&E staff also provided information about benefits counseling and ABLE accounts at multiple meetings with stakeholders.

Goal #7: Coordinate data collection, tracking, and analysis for all project tasks

Highlighted Activities

- Established data sharing agreements with key agency partners (2017)
- Supported a joint intake process between the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)

Increased accessibility of employment data

In 2018, DC L&E staff launched a DC-wide Resource Portal, which increased the accessibility of employment resources. The Resource Portal assists people in locating public and community services to promote integrated supports, includes common definitions, and provides cross-system resources. In addition, the joint intake process, which enables people who are in the DDA system and/or applying for services to readily access RSA (VR) services, allows DC L&E staff to track increased access to services by youth and young adults.

Sustainability

Incorporating DC L&E into existing initiatives and working with established agencies and organizations allows for DC L&E objectives to be sustainable after the PIE grant ends. DC L&E remains involved in several groups that will continue PIE initiatives after funding ends, with support from the Cultural and Linguistic Competency and Supporting Families CoPs, No Wrong Door partners, the Employment First Leadership Workgroup, and the State Employment Leadership Network. To support sustainability of PPTE, DC L&E coordinates with RSA about how to include PPTE as part of Pre-Employment Transition Services and created four PPTE training videos that will be available after the PIE grant ends. Additionally, DC L&E staff helped form the relationship between DDS/RSA and RCM of Washington. As a result, the DSP Academy will be fully funded by DDS/RSA post-PIE funding.

DC L&E Partners

- Department on Disability Services (Lead Agency)*
- Rehabilitation Services Administration
- Developmental Disabilities Administration
- Office of the State Superintendent of Education
- DC Public Schools
- Department of Employment Services
- Public Charter School Board
- Developmental Disabilities Council
- Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services
- University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at Georgetown University

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What is the Partnerships in Employment Project?

5-year grant awarded to 14 states: The Administration on Disabilities (AoD) awarded funding to eight states in 2011 and 2012, and six states in 2016: *District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Utah.*

Focus on competitive integrated employment for youth with I/DD: This project promotes cross-systems and cross-agency collaboration to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). *Competitive integrated employment (CIE)* is when “individuals with disabilities earn wages consistent with wages paid workers without disabilities in the community performing the same or similar work.”

States form consortiums: The six 2016 Partnerships in Employment states formed a consortium or coalition of stakeholders that include:

- ▶ **Individual Level:** Individuals with I/DD, family members
- ▶ **Community Level:** Pilot sites, employers, providers
- ▶ **State Level:** Developmental Disabilities Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, State Education Agency, State Developmental Disabilities Council, other state agencies

AoD contractors perform project evaluation and provide technical assistance: The Lewin Group is conducting a comprehensive, longitudinal evaluation and the Youth Employment Solutions (YES)! Center is providing training and technical assistance to states.