

What is the Partnerships in Employment project?

Multi-year project: Over the course of ten years, the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) awarded five-year grants to grantees in 14 states.

- ▶ **2011 to 2016:** California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin
- ▶ **2012 to 2017:** Alaska and Tennessee
- ▶ **2016 to 2021:** District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Utah

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

States form consortia: All 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, school administrators, businesses, employers, service providers
- ▶ **State Level:** Developmental Disabilities Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, State Education Agency, State Developmental Disabilities Council, other state agencies

AIDD contractors evaluate and review grantee progress: The Lewin Group is conducting a comprehensive evaluation for all grantees and the Institute for Community Inclusion provided technical assistance to the 2011 and 2012 grantees. The YES! Center provides technical assistance to the 2016 grantees.

PIE State Consortia

Project Period: 2011 to 2016

- ▶ California Consortium on the Employment of Youth and Young Adults with I/DD (CECY)
- ▶ Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE)
- ▶ Mississippi Partnerships for Employment (MSPE)
- ▶ Missouri Show-Me-Careers
- ▶ New York State Partnerships in Employment (NYS PIE)
- ▶ Wisconsin Let’s Get to Work

Project Period: 2012 to 2017

- ▶ Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI)
- ▶ TennesseeWorks Partnership

Project Overview

Between October 2011 and August 2017, the eight 2011 and 2012 Partnerships in Employment (PIE) states conducted systems change activities related to PIE project objectives – developing or changing policies, removing systemic barriers, building cross-system and cross-agency collaborations, and implementing strategies and promising practices to support competitive integrated employment.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the cross-state activities related to youth self-advocacy and is intended to reflect the PIE State Profiles and Final Evaluation Report for the 2011 and 2012 grantees.

What is youth self-advocacy?

According to The Arc, self-advocacy is defined as individuals with disabilities speaking and acting for themselves, and influencing and spreading awareness for disability-related topics and issues.ⁱⁱ Self-advocacy helps individuals with disabilities impact public policies and encourage peers with disabilities to pursue employment opportunities, among other things. Self-advocates and self-advocacy groups help people with disabilities with the following:

- Identifying rights and responsibilities
- Developing leadership and public speaking skills
- Learning about employment opportunities
- Engaging in policy conversations
- Developing confidence
- Sharing their experience as an individual with a disability

Since the PIE project is aimed at improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, many of the PIE consortia sought to engage youth self-advocates and include their input on project work. For example, consortia included youth self-advocates in consortium meetings (in Alaska, California, Mississippi, and Wisconsin), established youth self-advocate groups (in Alaska and California), created resources to engage and empower self-advocates (in Mississippi, New York, Tennessee, and Wisconsin), partnered with self-advocacy groups (in Mississippi and New York),

facilitated conferences or job fairs for self-advocates (in Alaska, Mississippi, and Tennessee). Consortia in Alaska, California, Iowa, Mississippi, and Missouri also engaged youth through National Disability Employment Awareness Month events, such as Take Your Legislator to Work Day. The sections below highlight examples of how states engaged youth self-advocates.

How do Partnerships in Employment states engage youth self-advocates?

Alaska

Alaska's Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) engaged youth through Peer Power Alaska, a self-advocacy organization. A student intern from a local university helped start Peer Power Alaska and began holding monthly teleconferences with 10 self-advocates. In September 2015, group membership included 49 youth from 14 cities in Alaska. In 2014 and 2015, Peer Power Alaska hosted a table at five job fairs across the state and co-sponsored a Youth Job Fair with 46 businesses in attendance. Peer Power Alaska and AIEI worked with the Youth Job Center to co-sponsor a Youth Job Fair in 2015 with 63 youth attending.

In 2015, Peer Power Alaska was awarded a grant to work with self-advocate organizations in four states to create the Equal Partners Interstate Congress. Peer Power Alaska worked to start a job club with ProjectSEARCH™ program interns and met with the Microenterprise grant fund administrators to discuss creating a peer network for past grantees.^{iii,iv} Members of Peer Power Alaska also drafted proposed training for medical providers on disability-related issues. As of September 2015, group membership included 49 youth from 14 cities in Alaska. In 2016, Peer Power co-sponsored a Youth Job Fair with King Career Center with 1,500 youth attendees. Peer Power continued to assist with the Youth Job Fair in 2017.

Peer Power visited the five major Alaskan hub communities, and as a result, membership increased by 60 members. Peer Power and AIEI also worked with the Stone Soup group to offer a job club to 11 youth with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

California

California's Consortium on the Employment of Youth and Young Adults with I/DD (CECY) established the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). CECY disseminated an application with 20 applicants responding and nine youth selected to join. YAC held monthly teleconference calls and would occasionally meet in-person. One YAC member, a graduate student intern for CECY, co-authored one of the California Community Conversation briefs. Several YAC members transitioned from school to employment or post-secondary education during the PIE grant. YAC self-advocates also participated in CECY meetings and provided insights on post-secondary education and Employment First. Additionally, the Chair of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities was a self-advocate who participated in CECY.

Mississippi

In 2016, Mississippi Partnerships for Employment (MSPE) and an MSPE self-advocate, Taylor Carley, began a monthly video series on YouTube called "[Chit Chat Thursdays with Taylor](#)." The episodes promote self-advocacy activities and successes in Mississippi, with a focus on self-advocacy efforts related to employment. In most videos, Taylor Carley conducts interviews with influential local self-advocates. In the first video, Mr. Carley interviewed self-advocate Reagan Ratcliff about her involvement in AmeriCorps, the STEP UP to Leadership Council, and the University of Southern Mississippi's undergraduate program. Mr. Carley also interviewed a local councilmember on the STEP UP Council, a subcommittee within the University of Southern Mississippi's Institute for Disability Studies (USM IDS) composed of youth leaders with and without disabilities. Mr. Carley was an employee at USM IDS during the PIE grant and also created self-advocacy presentations and provided information and mentoring to youth and young adults. After the PIE grant ended, Mr. Carley became a full-time employee at USM IDS and continued to produce Chit Chat videos. Chit Chat Thursdays with Taylor was driven by self-advocates and promoted sustainability of employment self-advocacy after the end of the PIE grant.

MSPE also engaged youth self-advocates in leadership councils and helped plan the annual state disAbility MegaConferences from 2012 to 2016.

New York

The New York State Partnerships in Employment (NYS PIE) had a project mission to build strong youth and young adult self-advocacy communities and partnerships with statewide and local business councils committed to hiring individuals with I/DD. One of the partner agencies was the Self-Advocacy Association in New York State (SANYS). From 2012 to 2013, NYS PIE collaborated with SANYS and Centers for Independent Living to develop and pilot self-advocacy trainings. NYS PIE funded and finalized the Self-Advocacy curriculum, which included eight units on subjects such as disclosure, employee rights, supports, and accommodations. The curriculum was finalized in September 2016 and was piloted in 5 Project SEARCH™ sites.

Tennessee

TennesseeWorks shared employment success stories on their [website](#) as a way of involving self-advocates. Videos included Tennessee's Employment Idol video success stories and success stories from the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). Youth self-advocates also shared their stories about employment on Vanderbilt's Kindred Stories [website](#).

Youth self-advocates, as well as families and service providers, also attended Annual TennesseeWorks Think Employment! Summits. Attendees participated in informational sessions focused on policy and provider work or interactive experiences for self-advocates.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin's Let's Get to Work (LGTW) program engaged youth through the Youth Track at LGTW Consortium meetings. The LGTW pilot program selected pilot schools to receive funding to create and improve

transition and disability services for youth with I/DD to assist them in gaining competitive integrated employment. LGTW pilot school students, both with and without I/DD, attended several Consortium meetings that focused on self-advocacy specific projects. Topics included learning about employment and post-secondary education programs similar to AmeriCorps, Project SEARCH™, and Think College available across the state, as well as training for youth to identify their strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and interests. In May 2013, students and staff from three LGTW pilot schools traveled to Washington, D.C. to discuss competitive integrated employment with policymakers. Students from pilot schools also participated in the "Take Your Legislator to Work" campaign, which allowed legislators to visit employees with I/DD at their workplace.

Self-Advocacy Promising Practices

As the consortia pursued various strategies to engage self-advocates and promote self-advocacy, several promising practices emerged. Some of these are listed below:

- Seek self-advocates' feedback and involve self-advocates in consortium meetings or activities;
- Establish youth self-advocate groups;
- Train youth to advocate for themselves in front of legislators;
- Provide opportunities (such as Take Your Legislator to Work Day and Disability Day on the Hill) for youth to interact with legislators and advocate for themselves;
- Facilitate conferences or job fairs to engage self-advocates.

ⁱ Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, Public Law 113-128 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 3101, et seq.).

ⁱⁱ Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved 2017, from <https://www.thearc.org/who-we-are/position-statements/rights/self-advocacy>

ⁱⁱⁱ ProjectSEARCH™ is a one-year school-to-work program that provides classroom instruction and on-the-job training. For more information please visit <https://projectsearch.azurewebsites.net/>.

^{iv} Microenterprise grants provide self-employment opportunities for people with I/DD who are Alaska Mental Health Trust Beneficiaries. For more information please visit <http://mhtrust.org/grants/microenterprise/>.



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