



## A Case Study for Implementing Systems Change for Employment First at the Local Level

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Through legislation in 2013, the state of California established an Employment First policy whereby “opportunities for integrated competitive employment shall be given the highest priority for working age Californians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.”<sup>1</sup>

One strategy advanced by the California Employment Consortium for Youth and Young Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (CECY) is for the implementation of Employment First to be guided and pushed forward at the local level. The Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC) was one of the first regional centers to adopt their own Employment First policy in March 2015. The RCOC Board is in the process of approving its strategic plan which includes increasing the number of consumers working in competitive integrated employment (CIE).

Since the adoption of the EF policy, there was an increase in 25% of consumers in integrated employment and decrease of 22% in consumers in sheltered workshops.<sup>2</sup> This 22% decrease is partially due to RCOC’s decision to shut the door to any new entries into sheltered work. The 25% increase is partially due to better tracking and documentation of employment.

Currently, RCOC serves 19,754 individuals of all ages of with a median age of 22.<sup>3</sup> There are approximately 7,631 working-age adults between the ages of 22 to 61, with 25% currently in integrated employment. Of the 25%, 21% were direct hires and receiving no employment services<sup>4</sup>; 36% were direct hires receiving employment services; and 43% were doing contract work in integrated settings (mostly at minimum wage).

### Strategies Used to Support Changes to Increase CIE

**COLLABORATION:** RCOC engages in several important collaborative efforts in their community to advance CIE, including with schools, and the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to support the smooth transition from school to work. Other important collaborations include the Orange County Employment Advocacy Network, Business Advisory Committee, Vendor Advisory Committee, Orange County Adult Transition Task Force, and Work Services Group. Some of the local schools are

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<sup>1</sup> WIC Sec. 4869. (a) (1) [“Return to Main Document”](#)

<sup>2</sup> This is an increase from 1,542 to 1,921 in integrated employment. Consumers in sheltered workshops decreased from a high of 647 consumers to 501. [“Return to Main Document”](#)

<sup>3</sup> Median age of individuals with developmental disabilities, excluding children receiving Early Start Services and individuals who reside in State Developmental Centers. [“Return to Main Document”](#)

<sup>4</sup> Employment services include individual and group supported employment and sheltered work /work activity programs. [“Return to Main Document”](#)

research sites for California's Promise Grant that is focused on school to work transition for youth receiving SSI and their families.

To enhance school to work transition, RCOC requires their service coordinators to participate in school Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. There has been a 92% increase in IEP attendance since 2013 (pre-adoption of an Employment First policy): 2,906 IEP meetings attended during the baseline year to 5,579 in 2015-2016.

**DATA COLLECTION:** In order to identify how many RCOC consumers are working, the data system was expanded to collect the number of hours worked, wages earned, and monthly benefits received by all consumers. In addition, descriptive information is gathered regarding the type of work and employment services received.

**SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION PLANNING AND REFERRAL:** Under the auspices of RCOC, the Orange County Employment Skills Development Pilot, an agreement between RCOC, DOR, and school districts, was implemented to facilitate a smooth transition from school to adult services. This pilot is being conducted in three school districts to improve referral processes and agency coordination.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** As a reflection of RCOC's commitment for employment, their Board of Directors elected to include an optional goal of increasing employment outcomes in their performance contract with the Department of Developmental Services. In 2015, RCOC exceeded the statewide average in the percentage of adults with earned income (RCOC 22%, statewide average 13%). 36% of adult consumers had an IPP goal for integrated employment vs. the statewide average of 27%, and 50% of adult consumers reported a desire for employment vs. the statewide average of 39% based on National Core Indicators survey.

**NEW SERVICES:** As of June 2016, RCOC is beginning a Project Search Program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities with Children's Hospital of Orange County, in addition to their partnership with a major local employer, Medtronic.

**STORIES OF SUCCESS:** Recently, 6 new jobs were developed at Gelson's, a high-end supermarket chain and another 6 consumers were hired at the Honda Center earning \$12.25 an hour. A real estate company recently hired a person who had been difficult to place.

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**Brief's Authoring Agency:**

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