



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL
AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

House Commerce and Labor Committee
March 9, 2010

**Workforce Supports and Opportunities for
Persons with Disabilities**

Integrated Service Delivery
Michael Donnelly
Director of Kansas Rehabilitation Services

For Additional Information Contact:
Katy Belot, Director of Public Policy
Docking State Office Building, 6th Floor North
(785) 296-3271



Workforce Supports and Opportunities for the Disabled

House Commerce and Labor Committee

March 9, 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to share information with the Committee on SRS' efforts to ensure that individuals with disabilities have opportunities to pursue, obtain and maintain employment. SRS has provided employment supports and related services to individuals with disabilities for many years through multiple programs. SRS currently has four programs that focus on employment services, three of which serve only persons with disabilities.

Economic and Employment Supports (EES) operates the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program that includes employment-related services. Of the 10,637 persons served last year, 23% (2,446) report earnings as a result of work. Disability is one of the barriers to employment documented for the TANF population. Job clubs, placement services and other support services are provided to assist eligible individuals to gain employment and reduce their reliance on cash, food and medical assistance. Wages achieved by customers of EES are competitive to the job or position the person achieves.

Community Supports and Services (CSS) manages the Home and Community Based Services programs that include services to support persons with disabilities to live and work in the community. The Developmental Disabilities (DD) Waiver most directly affects work opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities. DD Providers often provide a work-related day service or supports that empower an individual in a job in their community. Wages vary as providers sometimes utilize their sub-minimum wage certificates to set wages as allowed under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Others are competitive, integrated jobs in the community that are paid at minimum wage or higher depending on the position. DD providers reported 1,034 persons served were working in a competitive employment at the end of January 2010. Another 3,466 individuals were working in an environment designed for persons with developmental disabilities.

Mental Health Services also has an emphasis on assisting persons with severe and persistent mental illnesses to achieve successful employment outcomes. Research demonstrates that employment is a significant contributor to the recovery of persons with mental illness. This is recognized in Kansas mental health reform statute which defines community based mental



health services to include access to securing employment services. In addition, SRS' contract with community mental health centers (CMHCs) includes competitive employment of persons with a severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI) as one of the contract's outcomes. SRS pays enhanced Medicaid rates for CMHCs who demonstrate fidelity to the evidence-based practice of supported employment. Twenty-three percent of persons with an SPMI were reported to have been competitively employed at any point in the last year. SRS, in collaboration with the CMHCs, is working to improve this low employment rate.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is the primary SRS program designed to assist persons with disabilities to obtain, maintain or regain employment. VR serves persons with disabilities whose disability results in a substantial impediment to employment and who need VR services to get or keep a competitive, integrated job. VR services are not limited to the type of disability a person has, nor are services limited by the type of job they choose to pursue. VR services can include services to prepare an individual to obtain a job, to assist the person in finding the job and to help them be successful once they get the job. Services can include post-secondary education or training, assistive technology, medical services, transportation, job finding services, on-the-job supports and many other types of services. In Federal Fiscal Year 2009 VR assisted 11,856 individuals to pursue employment under an individualized plan for employment. As a result of services received, 1,426 obtained and maintained their job. Wages earned as a result of VR services vary widely but averaged \$9.67 statewide.

Last fall SRS began developing two key initiatives that will be funded through American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus funds. First, we plan to establish several demonstration projects focused on assisting individuals with developmental disabilities to engage in competitive integrated employment of at least 20 hours per week. This \$1.5 million dollar project will focus on individuals currently working in a sheltered setting or those on the waiting list for DD services. A special emphasis will be placed on youth transitioning from school to adulthood.

The second Recovery Act initiative is our effort to build capacity among community service providers to address the employment and independent living needs of Kansans who are blind or visually impaired. SRS has committed \$500,000 in Recovery Act funding to partner with community organizations and service providers to hire credentialed staff, improve outreach to persons who are blind or visually impaired, and to provide the variety of direct services necessary to assist individuals to be successful in their employment and independent living goals.



Stakeholder and consumer input led SRS to form and facilitate an Employment First Workgroup in July 2008. Membership includes DD providers, consumer representatives, the Kansas Health Policy Authority, SRS, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Education. The group has developed core Employment First principles and a mission statement: *The State of Kansas will establish integrated, competitive employment at a commensurate wage as the first priority for working age people with developmental disabilities. This initiative will be called Employment First.* The workgroup makes recommendations for SRS and other state agencies to consider as we work to ensure state policies and programs emphasize employment.

Governor Parkinson has asked several Cabinet Secretaries, the Commissioner of Education and others to participate in a stakeholder forum to better understand the barriers to employment that Kansans face (see attachment). He also asked that they determine next steps and actions to improve access to employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities. The forum will take place on April 16, 2010 at the Capitol Plaza hotel following a statewide Employment Summit organized as part of the state's Employment First initiative.

SRS is committed to improving opportunities for gainful employment of individuals with disabilities. We continue to work together with our many partners to ensure not only the opportunity to work, but that success is achieved.