

CHOICES/CEO Newsletter

Expanding Opportunities for Maine Workers with Disabilities



Welcome

Welcome to the wrap-up edition of the CHOICES/CEO newsletter.

Twelve years ago, Maine received a federal grant to expand work opportunities for people with disabilities. Funds for the CHOICES CEO (Comprehensive Employment Opportunity) project were provided by the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) as a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG).

The primary purpose of the grant has been to develop best practice programs and infra-

structure to promote the employment of people with disabilities. And sustainability is key: **System improvements and programs are in place that will be sustained beyond what was directly funded by the grant.**

The Maine MIG/CHOICES CEO project ends December 31, 2012. Here, we highlight grant-supported projects and big accomplishments of the last few years, spurred by the close collaboration and partnership between the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Maine Department of Labor (DOL) and other partners. **Links are provided throughout so you can learn more.**

Maine Business Leadership Network Launches

Maine's new Business Leadership Network (BLN) is up and running!

The Maine BLN is a statewide initiative designed to help employers and businesses diversify and access an emerging market — workers with disabilities. Charter members include L.L. Bean and Procter & Gamble.

It is an affiliate of the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN), the non-profit, business-to-business network that has more than



60 BLN affiliates and 5,000 business members nationwide.

Each employer-driven BLN serves as a catalyst, working to promote opportunities that benefit both businesses and people with disabilities. Busi-

nesses join a BLN to find out how to expand their diversity-recruiting efforts to include workers with disabilities — not as a social model but as a business case to recruit talent, better serve their customers and boost their bottom line.

Being a member of a BLN also sends a strong message to the community that the business is committed to including people with disabilities in its workforce.

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Workers with Disabilities: Contributing to Maine's Workforce



EmploymentforME.org Is Maine's Clearinghouse For Disability Employment Resources

Maine's DHHS and DOL joined forces to create EmploymentforME.org, a comprehensive, one-stop-shop website for employment-related information and initiatives. With sections for **job seekers and workers with disabilities, employers and providers of services — plus a fourth section for transition-aged youth and their families, coming soon** — the site contains a wealth of information and resources about work and disability.

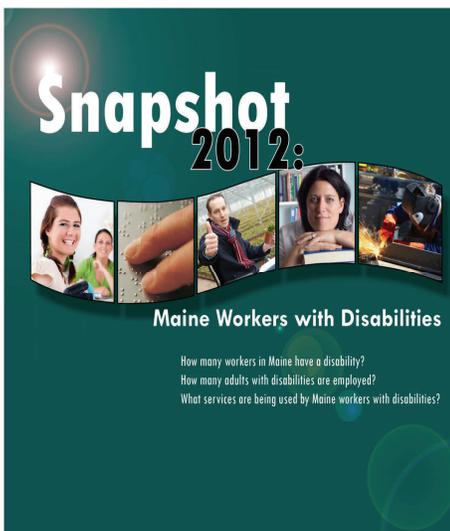
The site is user-friendly and organized to help people find what they need — fast. If you're a job seeker or worker with disabilities, or a provider of services assisting a client, you'll get information and links on job-seeking services, training, rights and protections, requesting accommodations, benefits, transportation and much more.

Maine employers looking for creative workforce solutions will learn what it takes to diversify, including how to find qualified workers, understand legal obligations and protections, and access training options to develop a strong workforce.

Youth and young adults, and their families and community providers, will soon be able to find helpful information and tools and click on links to help them successfully make the transition to the world of work. Look for this new section of the website to be in place in the coming months.

Visit <http://employmentforme.org/> and take a test drive!

SNAPSHOT 2012 Available at CWRI Website



How many Maine workers have a disability?

How many adults with disabilities are employed?

What services do Maine workers with disabilities use?

You'll find the answers to these questions, and much more, in *Snapshot 2012*, an annual publication that provides the latest employment trends, statistics and information on people with disabilities in Maine.

With funding from MIG, the Maine Department of Labor's Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI) has put a system in place for collecting and analyzing data and publishing *Snapshot* each year.

CWRI's measurements of the Maine labor market help state government officials, employers, educators, trainers and others make informed decisions that promote economic opportunity and employment. The yearly *Snapshot* is a clear-eyed look at the big picture and an invaluable resource for helping people with disabilities explore employment options.

To download the full report, go to <http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/>

We Can Work Peer-Support Program Coming to Maine



It's all about who you know when it comes to finding a job, getting a recommendation for a job, or learning about new job or training opportunities.

The We Can Work campaign is a grassroots, peer-support program that aims to **build hope among people with mental health diagnoses and empower them to pursue and achieve employment goals.**

The New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS) created the campaign in New York. Maine obtained permission from NYAPRS to develop a homegrown version; with MIG funding, this initiative is currently in the works.

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Myth: People with psychiatric disabilities do not want to work.

Fact: Research shows the overwhelming percentage of people with psychiatric disabilities want to start, or return to, work.

Myth: People with psychiatric disabilities just can't work.

Fact: Studies prove that, with current supports, up to 75% of people with psychiatric disabilities can achieve competitive employment.

Videos for Transition-Age Youth Created by Maine Parent Federation

The Maine Parent Federation (MPF) has developed useful online videos for transition-age youth and their families transitioning from high school to college and from high school to work, with funds provided by MIG. The videos can be found at the MPF's online-community website Starting Points for Maine (click on the tab "Online Training," then go to "Transitions").

Current videos include:

- Transition 101: The Parent Perspective
- Exploring Employment: The Transition Years
- Parent Advocacy: The Transition Years
- Transition Career Exploration Workshop
- An Introduction to the Transition Years
- Freshman 101: Transitions

To view the videos, go to <http://www.startingpointsforme.org/>
The Maine Parent Federation's website is <http://www.mpf.org/>

Lewiston's Looking Ahead Clubhouse Is Up and Running

Augusta-based Kennebec Behavioral Health (KBH) opened Maine's third psychosocial clubhouse, the Looking Ahead Clubhouse on Main Street in Lewiston, this past January.

MIG provided resources and support to help with the startup. Looking Ahead joins the High Hopes Clubhouse in Waterville and the Capitol Clubhouse in Augusta. (A fourth clubhouse, Unlimited Solutions on Summer Street in Bangor, just opened in October and is overseen by Penobscot Community Health Care.)

In an upbeat and accepting environment, the Clubhouses provide much-needed social support and help their members overcome barriers



to employment. **They give people living with mental illness a place to learn, work and make new friends.**

Services include job development, placement, coaching and support, plus educational resources for those wishing to improve literacy, work on their GED, enroll in college courses and more.

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Syntiro Is the Online Home of Employment for ME's Workforce Development System



Maine DHHS and Maine DOL have partnered with Syntiro, a nonprofit based in Readfield, to provide innovative professional learning and development for employment specialists, including a comprehensive annual mentoring program for new employment specialists. Syntiro is now the online home of Employment for ME's Workforce Development System (WDS).

A statewide calendar of events provides information on upcoming ACRE Employment Specialist certification opportunities, advanced training, and free monthly webinars for Maine CRPs and work support providers.

To learn more about the Maine Mentor Program, sign up for e-mail alerts on future trainings and see what is happening on the WDS training calendar, go to <http://www.syntiro.org/>

Goodwill Industries Investigates Employment Following Brain Injury

Goodwill Industries of Northern New England received MIG funding to survey Mainers with acquired brain injury on how their disability affects employment. It is the first comprehensive study on the subject conducted in the state in more than 20 years.

The report ("Employment Following Brain Injury in the State of Maine: Perceptions from Neurorehabilitation") **examines the unique perspectives, challenges and obstacles of those affected by brain injury.** It focuses on the often-lengthy physical, cognitive and psychological adjustments and therapies required; whether people are getting the vocational services and help they need to recover and join, or rejoin, the workforce; and their overall satisfaction with services.

Supported work programs, job coaching, vocational rehabilitation and neuro-rehabilitation services are invaluable aids in helping brain-injury survivors find and maintain employment. But according to research, up to 75% lose their jobs within the first 90 days, due to loss of support services, changes in job duties or managers, and difficulties adjusting to new responsibilities.

The data collected by the new study will be used to develop a strategic plan for vocational services for individuals with brain injury. This plan should help provide better employment outcomes for those affected by brain injury.

TANF Recipients with Disabilities Get Enhanced Services

Last year Maine adopted legislative changes that established a lifetime benefit limit of 60 months for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients. This change prompted Maine's DHHS to institute system improvements that better assist TANF recipients in finding, and keeping, a job.

One area of focus was the early identification of TANF recipients with disabilities, **so that they get the services they need to overcome potential barriers to employment.** A workgroup representing TANF, ASPIRE, the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental



Health Services, and the Office of Aging and Disabilities Services came together with Maine DOL's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) to make that happen.

TANF and ASPIRE staff training, and improved coordination with Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, has made it possible for TANF workers to make appropriate referrals to BRS in a timely fashion.

As a result, TANF recipients with disabilities are able to access vocational rehabilitation services that can substantially improve their chances of becoming employed.

DRC Creates Ticket to Work Guide

Maine's Disability Rights Center has created a new guide targeted at people with disabilities who want to learn more about the Ticket to Work program. This user-friendly guide to "the Ticket" includes a basic overview of the federal program, a Frequently Asked Questions section and a resource contact list.

To view or download the guide, go to www.drcme.org, click on publications, then click on resource guides.



- One in five Americans has a disability
- One in 10 working-age people (21-64) has a disability
- 30% of the nation's families have a family member with a disability
- Almost one in five veterans has a VA service-connected disability
- Workers with disabilities have a higher retention rate
- 90% of Americans prefer to give their business to employers and companies that hire people with disabilities
- People with disabilities are a growing consumer market with more than \$1 trillion in buying power



Employment Advocacy Expands in Maine

In the fall of 2011, MIG grant funds supported a group of Mainers with disabilities in attending the national Alliance for Full Participation conference in Washington, D.C. The conference highlighted "Employment First" initiatives across the country and fostered the development of state teams committed to promoting policies that support competitive employment of people with disabilities.

The Maine group returned from D.C. as a bona fide Employment First state team. While some states' Employment First teams focus solely on employment of people with intellectual disabilities, the Maine team has committed to a cross-disability initiative.

This past spring, Maine's Disability Rights Center trained the conference attendees, plus other interested people with disabilities, about disability employment rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Maine's Human Rights Act. The trainees have gone on to be involved in various advocacy groups, including the State Rehabilitation Council, the Consumer Council System of Maine, and Employment First Maine.

For more information about Employment First initiatives across the country, go to the federal Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) website at:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/EmploymentFirst.htm>

On Facebook?
Check out these helpful pages:

Maine BLN

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Maine-Business-Leadership-Network/276406172470360?fref=ts>

Maine DOL

<http://www.facebook.com/MaineDOL?ref=search>

Disability.gov

<http://www.facebook.com/Disability.gov?ref=search>

Work Without Limits

<http://www.facebook.com/workwithoutlimits?ref=ts>

The US Business Leadership Network (USBLN)

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/49905154853/>

National Council on Disability (NCD)

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/National-Council-on-Disability-NCD/110329252321618?ref=search>

Syntiro

<http://www.facebook.com/Syntiro>

More and more organizations are adding Facebook pages, so search often to find new listings.

MBLN: continued from page 1

Employment and training consultant and author Jim Baumer is the newly minted director of the Maine BLN. He is based in Augusta at the offices of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, a partner in the new venture. Since coming onboard, Baumer has been busy talking up the BLN with state employers, and he reports that both US Cellular and the Aroostook Centre Mall have agreed to sit on the BLN Employer Steering Committee.

Baumer is also pursuing a strategic partnership with the SHRM Maine State Council, a statewide network of progressive HR professionals who are committed to diversity and inclusion in their hiring practices.

"Our goal is to be a resource for Maine's business community and provide value to



them, while also enhancing opportunities for individuals with disabilities," Baumer says.

The USBLN featured the Maine BLN as the BLN Affiliate of the Month in November, he says. Maine BLN member benefits include access to local and national resources and real-world information, education, training, tools and support to help diversify the talent pool, plus key networking opportunities with like-minded businesses and employers who understand that hiring workers with disabilities makes good business sense.

To learn more about the Maine BLN — including how to become a charter member — contact director Jim Baumer at (207) 215-1492 or e-mail director@mainebln.org. Check out the Maine BLN's website at www.mainebln.org and "Like" it on Facebook.

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Many people with mental health diagnoses feel hopeless about their employment opportunities and career future. Plans call for peer-support groups to be formed at peer-support and recovery centers across the state.

These support groups can **help decrease feelings of isolation by developing relationships, expanding social networks and contacts, and providing a more positive outlook on employment potential.**

Unemployment is hard on everyone, but it can have significant negative consequences for those with a mental health diagnosis, contributing to stress and hardship, low self-esteem and a longer recovery period. Studies show that **employment is the most significant outcome** for people who have experienced serious mental health problems. Once in place, Maine's We Can Work campaign should make it easier to break down barriers and close the employment gap.

To learn more about New York's We Can Work campaign, go to <http://www.nyaprs.org/community-economic-development/toolkit/>

Watch for more information on Maine's We Can Work campaign in the coming months. Visit <http://employmentforme.org/> for the latest news and information.

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There is also an in-house prevocational program that focuses on members' strengths rather than their illnesses.

A hallmark of the Clubhouse model is Transitional Employment, a structured approach that offers members the opportunity to work at paid, part-time jobs for six to nine months.

The Clubhouses partner with community businesses. Workers get support from Clubhouse staff, other Clubhouse members and their temporary employer to help them succeed.

(One of the first business partners was Marden's, and Gov. Paul LePage, formerly Marden's general manager, is a longtime supporter of the program and nationally recognized for his commitment.)

For those not ready to work, the Clubhouses provide a safe haven to overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness. All members are expected to work to keep the Clubhouse running, by manning phones, cooking meals and more.

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This “work-ordered day” gives members an opportunity to contribute, which can provide a much-needed boost to their self-esteem.

The Clubhouse concept originated in New York City in 1948 with Fountain House, a still-thriving organization that serves as the model and inspiration for Clubhouses around the world. It began with the belief that people with mental illness are capable of helping each other live up to their true potential.

At the heart of the Clubhouse model are four guarantees, or rights of membership: a right to a place to come, a right to meaningful relationships, a right to meaningful work and a right to a place to return. Any and all people with mental illness who enter a Clubhouse are considered members. And once a member, always a member.

There is an informative article and video about the Lewiston Clubhouse on the *Lewiston-Auburn Sun Journal's* website. Go to <http://www.sunjournal.com/lookingahead>

To learn more about the three Maine Clubhouses administered by Kennebec Behavioral Health, go to <http://www.kbhmaine.org/?q=vocationalclubhouses>

To learn more about the brand-new Unlimited Solutions Clubhouse in Bangor administered by Penobscot Community Health Care, go to http://www.pchc.com/?id=2&sub_id=109

Phone numbers for the Maine Clubhouses:

High Hopes in Waterville at (207) 877-0038;

Capitol Clubhouse in Augusta at (207) 629-9080;

Looking Ahead in Lewiston at (207) 376-1711; or

Unlimited Solutions in Bangor at (207) 408-8383.

To find out more about Fountain House in New York City, go to <http://www.fountainhouse.org/content/about>