

Introduction

Improving the employment participation rate of individuals with disabilities is a significant policy priority. Two major policy initiatives in this arena have moved ahead affecting the lives of people with disabilities who work or want to work: the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TWWIA) and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). TWWIA aims to improve access to employment for individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). WIA seeks to establish a unified system of workforce development, encouraging people with disabilities to use the generic employment services and supports available through One-Stop Career Centers in addition to traditional disability-specific services.

In 2002 and 2003, the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) conducted a national survey of Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) that was funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The goal was to identify major trends in employment and non-work services for people with developmental disabilities. Since CRPs are key partners in implementing disability-related employment policy, including TWWIA and WIA, researchers were interested in the extent to which organizations participated in these initiatives. Overall, survey findings showed that CRPs were more involved in WIA than in TWWIA.

Background

There are over 8,000 CRPs in the United States, making these agencies a major source of employment and day services for people with developmental disabilities (see Menz et al., 2003). ICI found that the majority of individuals served by CRPs in employment and non-work services were supported in facility-based employment. This category includes sheltered employment and work center-based employment (41%) followed by facility-based non-work (21%). This finding indicated that facility-based programs were still the predominant service model for people with developmental disabilities (Metzel et al., 2004; Sullivan et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, since the introduction of supported employment in the mid-1980s there has been some progress at the policy level to improve the employment situation of people with disabilities. The engagement of CRPs in TWWIA and WIA provides one measure of the effectiveness of these policy initiatives in engaging the disability community.

TWWIA is designed to improve access to employment for SSI and SSDI recipients in a number of ways, including increasing access to health insurance by expanding state support for Medicaid Buy-In programs for individuals who are working and making high-quality benefits counseling available through a nationwide network of Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach projects. The key activity for service providers is the Ticket to Work program. This program allows individuals to select an employment support provider, referred to as an Employment Network (EN), via a "Ticket" that gives them greater control over their employment process. ENs receive payments from the Social Security Administration (SSA) based upon the Ticket holder achieving sufficient earnings to discontinue SSI/SSDI cash benefits. Any public or private organization, including CRPs, can become an EN. All state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies are ENs.

With similar goals, WIA mandated the delivery of "one-stop" employment and training services to all job seekers, including those with disabilities, through a national network of One-Stop Centers. One-Stops are governed by state and local Workforce Investment Boards, and consist of a number of mandated partners, including VR. Most states began operating One-Stops in July 2001. WIA not only encourages linkage-building between One-Stops and their required partners but also sets the stage to create new collaborative opportunities with CRPs (Boeltzig et al., 2005).

CRP Sample and Characteristics

This study surveyed 507 CRPs nationwide, 245 of which completed the questionnaire. The majority of CRPs (69%) provided both employment and non-work services. Of the remainder, 24% provided only employment services and supports compared to 7% that provided non-work services only. Of those who provided employment services, 65% offered employment in both integrated and sheltered settings. Seventeen percent provided employment only in integrated settings; 11% provided only sheltered employment (Metzel et al., 2004).

Findings

It should be noted that findings are based on the FY2002/03 survey.

Ticket to Work

The majority of CRPs had no association with an Employment Network. Organizations were asked if they were an approved EN or part of an existing EN under the Ticket to Work. Of the 191 providers that responded to this question, over two-thirds (71%) indicated that they were not involved in such networks. Three percent of CRPs were unsure of their EN status. Of the respondents who provided integrated employment, only 28% were part of an EN.

Of those with no EN involvement, only a minority expressed interest in becoming or joining one. Of the 136 CRPs that reported no involvement in the Ticket to Work, only 19% indicated that they were interested in becoming an EN or joining an existing one. Thirty-six percent were unsure whether they wanted to get involved in the Ticket program, and 45% had no interest.

WIA

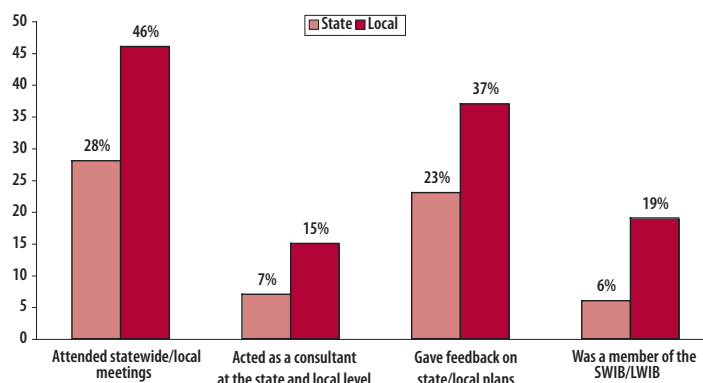
There is limited involvement of CRPs in State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) activities.

Survey results showed little interaction between CRPs and SWIBs (see Figure 1). CRP involvement in board activities consisted mainly of attending SWIB meetings (28%) and providing feedback on state plans¹ (23%). CRPs rarely acted in a consultant capacity to SWIBs (7%). Only 6% were SWIB members. An average of 4% did not know if their organization was involved in any SWIB activities.

Approximately 50% of CRPs had attended Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB) meetings.

Survey respondents seemed to be more engaged in board activities at the local level than at the state level (see Figure 1). Forty-six percent had attended LWIB meetings and 37% had commented on LWIB plans. Almost twice as many CRPs (15%) had acted as consultants to their LWIB compared to their SWIB (7%). Likewise, 19% of the responding agencies were LWIB members. An average of 6% did not know if their organization was involved in any of these activities.

Figure 1: CRP Involvement in State and Local Workforce Investment Board Activities (N=187)



CRPs used One-Stops as a resource for job seekers to some degree (see Table 1). CRPs were almost evenly divided on One-Stop service usage. Approximately 40% of the responding agencies had taken clients to the One-Stops and assisted them in using core services, while 41% had used the One-Stops to find job vacancies, write resumes, and use other resources on a client's behalf.

There is less evidence that One-Stop Career Centers are using CRPs as a resource. About one-third of CRPs (32%) had received a referral from a One-Stop Career Center. Only a small percentage of survey respondents indicated that they were an approved training services provider (11%) or had a training contract with the LWIB (10%). Percentages of respondents who did not know whether their staff members were engaged with the local One-Stop varied per activity, ranging from 5% (CRP staff encourage job seekers to use One-Stops) to 21% (CRP is an approved training provider).

Table 1: CRP Involvement in One-Stop Career Center Activities (N=187)

One-Stop activities	CRP involvement (%)
CRP staff encouraged job seekers to use the One-Stop	50
CRP staff took job seekers to the One-Stop and assisted them in using core services	40
CRP staff used the One-Stop to find job vacancies, write resumes, and use other resources on behalf of job seekers	41
One-Stop staff referred people to the CRP who as a result received services from the CRP	32
CRP agency was an approved training provider for customers who had Individual Training Accounts*	11
CRP agency had a training contract with the LWIB**	10

* Individual Training Accounts are WIA training funds that can be used by individuals who have been determined eligible by their local One-Stop.

** This contract makes CRPs eligible to receive individual referrals from One-Stops to provide WIA-funded training to job seekers.

¹ Under Section 501 of WIA, each state and local area must periodically prepare a "unified plan" that provides the strategic direction for its workforce development system and operating guidance for the system's training programs. The plan is submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.

Implications and Discussion

The findings of this research show that although CRP participation in TWWIIA and WIA initiatives remains modest, more CRPs are involved in One-Stop employment services than joining ENs.

This finding is surprising considering that the Ticket to Work program specifically targets a population that is served primarily by CRPs. The finding that only a small percentage of service providers are associated with an EN indicates that five years after the passing of the legislation, the Ticket to Work program has not yet achieved what it set out to do. This is also a concern for the viability of the Ticket program as a whole, as its success depends on the number and quality of ENs.

Given limited program participation, the question arises: What prevents service providers from becoming or joining an EN? Barriers identified in current research include the outcome-oriented **payment system/structure**, where service providers receive payments only after providing the service and only if the Ticket holder's earnings fully eliminate cash benefits; and the **administrative burden** resulting from the need to document individuals' earnings and educate potential Ticket holders about the program (Disability Research Institute, 2003). Policymakers are making efforts to address these issues, as evidenced most recently by SSA's request for comments on proposed revisions to the Ticket program (Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 189; September 30, 2005).

Furthermore, even if organizations decide to become an approved provider or join an existing EN, this does not mean that they will accept Tickets. Livermore (2003) found that of the 800 organizations authorized under the Ticket to Work in May 2003, only 200 were accepting Tickets. This means that the majority of people with disabilities who have a Ticket will continue receiving services primarily through state disability agencies, particularly VR, Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and Mental Health agencies. As of September 2005, 8179 of the approximately 11 million Tickets given out by SSA had been allocated to ENs (including CRPs), compared to 96,358 assigned to state VR agencies. (See www.ssa.gov/work/ServiceProviders/StateTicketTracker.html, retrieved October 6, 2005.) The remaining Tickets issued have not yet been assigned to any EN.

In contrast to the Ticket program, our findings show that a considerable number of CRPs are involved in workforce board activities at a local level, providing evidence that CRPs and One-Stops are making an effort to work together as a first step toward creating a more integrated employment service system. Boeltzig et al. (2005) have identified benefits to involving community-based disability organizations, including CRPs, in the One-Stop system. These organizations can help equip One-Stop staff with

the skills and resources needed to better serve job seekers with disabilities. At the same time, One-Stop staff can give disability organizations access to employment-related resources for the individuals they support.

It should be noted that while the analysis yielded positive results, our findings say very little about the actual degree of service use or satisfaction with One-Stop services among respondents. For example, did CRPs regularly use the services and resources at their local One-Stop, and how helpful were they? This is an area that warrants further research. In addition, there is a need to better understand the role that CRPs can play in the workforce system and how they can influence One-Stop Career Centers to become more responsive to the needs of people with disabilities.

Conclusion

CRPs are important partners in implementing disability-related employment policy, including the Ticket to Work program and WIA. However, findings of this research show that further collaboration is needed to expand employment service options and resources for people with disabilities. In striving to increase the pool of service providers under the Ticket to Work, policymakers need to continue addressing the identified barriers that still prevent organizations from becoming approved providers or joining an existing EN. Additionally, there are many opportunities for CRPs to get involved with their local One-Stop Career Centers, thereby expanding their networks and creating potential referral sources. These policy initiatives create opportunities to allow people with disabilities greater access to community employment.

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