

In the five years that Employment First has been policy in Ohio, efforts by multiple agencies have been directed toward improving employment and employment-readiness opportunities for young adults with developmental disabilities (DD). Considerable progress has been made for people with DD as a whole, but for individuals with significant behavior, communication and sensory challenges, major barriers still exist. Research has shown that, with the right supports, these young adults with significant challenges can be successful in the workplace.

On April 26, 2018, a conference called "Policy to Practice: strategies for supporting young adults with the most significant communication and behavior challenges" was held at the Warren County Educational Service Center. Representatives of state and federal agencies presented information on their agency's policies. Regional representatives and attendees discussed how those policies are put into practice in southwest Ohio.

In discussions leading up to the conference, the planning workgroup identified some overarching questions to help us explore the current state of practice and recognize barriers that exist for people with the most significant behavior, communication and sensory challenges. The conference was the first step in this exploration. The goal is to continue this conversation, to design and implement strategies to overcome these barriers and positively influence both policy and practice to promote community-based employment and meaningful life engagement for young adults with the most significant behavior, communication and sensory support needs.

These are the questions driving this initiative, as related to people with social-communication disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and related disabilities who have the **most significant communication, sensory and behavior support needs**:

- 1) How could the assessment process be approached so it would provide a more accurate representation of an individual's ability to work in an integrated community setting than is currently experienced by many of these young adults?
- 2) How can transition teams bound by DOE guidelines and funding work with adult service providers bound by DODD/OOD/DoL guidelines and funding to promote more of the successful transitions demonstrated to result from these close collaborations?
- 3) How do we pursue meaningful discovery to ensure that individuals with ASD and the most significant support needs have sufficient time and opportunity to explore and understand meaningful employment options?
- 4) Related to the question above, how do we provide enough experiences for these individuals to develop both specific and soft skills related to employment?
- 5) How can we operate within Department of Labor guidelines for unpaid work experience and still provide the incremental, experiential learning opportunities that are necessary for people with these challenges to be successful?
- 6) How do we approach the apparent paradox wherein an individual is considered "too disabled to work" by one state system (OOD), yet merits only the lowest level of acuity rating (and thus support) by another (DD)?
- 7) How can current funding systems, individually and combined, be applied to provide the individualized, community integrated supports that allow individuals to meet their goals?
- 8) How do we balance their rights as adults to not engage in meaningful daily activity with the limited understanding of long term gain inherent in ASD and similar disabilities?

