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Collaboration
to Promote
Self-Determination

**COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT
FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES:
MYTHS AND TRUTHS**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a bipartisan bill passed by Congress in 2014 that established competitive integrated employment (CIE) as a national priority for people with disabilities, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). WIOA is intended to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and shows Congress' commitment to expanding opportunities for CIE.

CIE, as defined by WIOA, has three primary components:

- *Competitive* – Individuals with disabilities are paid the same as people without disabilities for doing the same or similar work. The law specifies that competitive pay cannot be less than minimum wage.
- *Integrated* – Individuals with disabilities have opportunities to interact with co-workers without disabilities in the workplace to the same extent as any other employee performing the same or similar work. The focus is on interacting with non-disabled co-workers, not with supervisors or disability support providers.
- *Employment* – Employment means full or part-time work, including self-employment.

Compared to other approaches, such as group-based employment models or sheltered workshops, participation in CIE is more likely to result in improved outcomes for people with I/DD. For example, individuals who receive state I/DD services and work in CIE earn more than individuals receiving I/DD services who work in group-based employment.¹ People with I/DD working in CIE report having more friends who are not staff or family, participating in more activities in the community, and are more likely to be involved in making decisions for themselves.²

MYTH: Most people with I/DD are unable to work in the regular workforce and should be employed by a “work center” or “sheltered workshop.”

TRUTH: **People with disabilities can — and do — work in all areas of the American workforce.** Millions of individuals with disabilities, including people with I/DD, can and do obtain CIE in the regular workforce. While there may be some people who have significant disabilities and severe health conditions that preclude employment, the vast majority of people with disabilities can work in CIE. CIE placements can be achieved in traditional jobs with accommodations, supported or customized employment, job carving and other supports as needed.

CIE helps people with disabilities access the greater community, build relationships with people without disabilities, and develop new skills and self-esteem. It also helps them to earn money to get out of poverty, use less Medicaid services, and have meaningful ways to spend their days. As with most people, individuals with disabilities rise to meet higher expectations.

MYTH: Most people with I/DD do not want to work in the regular workforce.

TRUTH: Most people with disabilities want, and should be given the opportunity, to work in regular jobs alongside people with and without disabilities.

According to the [2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment & Disability Survey](#),³ the majority of people with disabilities – 68 percent – are working or involved in work-related activities, including actively preparing for employment and searching for jobs. The National Core Indicators™ (NCI), which evaluates the outcomes of state’s disability services, reported that in 2017, almost one-half (46.7%) of people with I/DD who did not already have a paid job in the community said they would like to have one.⁴

MYTH: People with disabilities need to learn employment skills in sheltered environments or segregated training programs before they are ready for CIE.

TRUTH: People with disabilities are most successful in employment when they receive on-the-job training, not in separate or sheltered training programs. People with disabilities learn best in the environment where they will be working, rather than having to transfer what they learned in a training program to a new work environment. Studies have demonstrated that individuals who go straight into CIE end up receiving higher wages and cost taxpayers significantly less money than individuals with similar impact of disabilities who receive pre-vocational services in sheltered environments prior to pursuing CIE. One study concluded that there was a 42.5% cost reduction and a 15.1% increase in earnings for individuals with disabilities who went straight into CIE rather than first receiving pre-vocational services in sheltered workshops.⁵

MYTH: People with I/DD are safer working in segregated or sheltered environments than working in the community.

TRUTH: Research and experience have shown that people with disabilities are safest when they have relationships with people who are not paid staff and when they are known in their communities. People with disabilities are more likely to experience abuse, neglect, and exploitation when they are separated and out of sight in segregated settings where there is very little oversight and accountability.⁶ People who work in the community report having their rights respected more often than those who do not work in the community. People who work in the community also report feeling less afraid in their daily lives and are more likely to have someone they can go to if they do feel afraid.⁷

MYTH: Hiring people with I/DD is not good for business.

TRUTH: Hiring and accommodating people with I/DD is not only the right thing to do, but it also improves the bottom line. The US Chamber of Commerce Report, “[Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion](#),” highlights best practices for hiring and supporting people with disabilities and shows that this is good for the bottom line.⁸ Similarly, a DePaul University study shows that the costs for employers to make accommodations for employees with disabilities are very minimal compared to the benefits the company obtains.⁹

Another recent nationwide study of more than 200 organizations, “[Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#),” found that more than three-quarters of employers rated their employees with I/DD as “good” to “very good” on most performance factors – including work quality and productivity. Nearly three-quarters of companies that hire workers with I/DD reported a positive experience, with fully one-third of high-performance organizations--based on measures of profitability, market share, revenue growth, and customer satisfaction over time--saying the experience *exceeded expectations*.¹⁰

MYTH: Students with I/DD in school should only focus on academics and life skills, and should begin their training and search for CIE after they exit the school system.

TRUTH: Planning for transition from school to employment is a critically important part of the education of students with disabilities and is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA requires that transition planning begin by age 16, and best practice is to begin by age 14.

There is immense value in obtaining employment experience while a student is still in school. In fact, work experience during school years more often leads to successful employment after transition. Research shows that getting a job after graduation is most likely to occur when: work experiences happen throughout secondary school and begin early in secondary school; when integrated paid work is experienced before students exit school; and when participation in work experience is supported by families.¹¹ Apprenticeships can also be an important pathway for students transitioning to CIE.

MYTH: People with disabilities who choose to work end up spending most of their daytime hours at home with nothing to do.

TRUTH: People with disabilities who do not work full-time can receive supports to participate in other programs and activities in the community when they are not working to create a complete meaningful day. These activities can include, for example, volunteer work; post-secondary, adult or continuing education; accessing community facilities such as a local library, gym or recreation center; participation in retirement or senior activities (for older adults); or anything else people with and without disabilities do in their off-work time. These activities can support career exploration for people who are not yet working or who are between jobs, supplement employment hours for people who are working part-time, or serve as a retirement option for older adults with disabilities. State disability systems use different terms for these

types of activities – community life engagement, community-based non-work, wraparound supports or community integration services.

People with I/DD who are working in CIE actually spend more time engaged in community activities compared with people who are not working or who are in sheltered workshops. NCI data reporting on state’s I/DD systems shows that people who are working in CIE are more active in the community and have developed more meaningful natural supports, including participating in community groups and activities.¹²

The Collaboration to Promote Self Determination (CPSD) is a collaboration of national organizations representing people with disabilities and their families committed to educating Congress and federal agencies about what people with disabilities need to rise out of poverty and live more independently. We advocate for major systemic reform of the nation’s disability laws and programs so people with disabilities can become employed, earn competitive wages, live independently in inclusive communities, and rise out of poverty. More information at www.thecpsd.org.

¹ Butterworth, J. at al. “National Core Indicators: Data on the current state of employment of adults with IDD and suggestions for policy development,” *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 42(3), 209-220 (2015).

² National Core Indicators Data Brief, “What Work Means: What Does NCI tell us about the quality of life of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are employed in the community,” (“NCI Data Brief”) (Dec. 2011), available at https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NCI_Data_Brief_-_Employment_-_Issue_5_Dec_2011_FINAL_1.pdf; National Core Indicators 2016-2017 Adult Consumer Survey Final Report (“NCI 2016-17 Final Report”) (May 2018), available at https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NCI_2016-17_ACS_NATIONAL_REPORT_PART_I_%286_29%29.pdf.

³ 2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment & Disabilities Survey, available at <https://kesslerfoundation.org/kfsurvey15>.

⁴ National Core Indicators Data Brief, “Working in the Community: The Status and Outcomes of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Integrated Employment—Update 2,” (June 2016), available at https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NCI_DataBrief_Employment_Update_2014_2015edit_6_28_2016.pdf

⁵ Robert Evert Citera at al. “Do Sheltered Workshops Enhance Employment Outcomes for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder?” *Autism*, (2011) available at <http://aut.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/05/19/1362361311408129>; Robert Citera, “Does Being in Sheltered Workshops Improve the Employment Outcomes of Supported Employees with Intellectual Disabilities?” *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* (March 2011); Robert Citera, “The cost-trends of supported employment versus sheltered employment,” *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* (2008), available at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1331/d1151b14ef2d0f8514b2d5d44bb6cf568176.pdf>

⁶ See EEOC Press Release “Jury Awards \$240 Million for Long-Term Abuse of Workers with Intellectual Disabilities” (May 2013), available at <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/5-1-13b.cfm>

⁷ See NCI Data Brief and NCI 2016-17 Final Report at n. ii.

⁸ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Leading Practice on Disability Inclusion,” (2013), available at https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/documents/files/020709_DisabilityInclusion_final.pdf

⁹ DePaul University, “Exploring the Bottom Line: A Study of the Costs and Benefits of Workers with Disabilities,” (Oct. 2007), available at http://bbi.syr.edu/_assets/staff_bio_publications/McDonald_Exploring_the_Bottom_Line_2007.pdf

¹⁰ Institute for Corporate Productivity, “Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities,” (Oct. 2014), available at <https://www.i4cp.com/trendwatchers/2014/10/15/what-your-d-i-policy-is-missing-employing-people-with-intellectual-and-developmental-disabilities#.VD-EFUITNKK.twitter>

¹¹ Wehman, P., Sima, A., Ketchum, J, West, M., Chan, F. & Luecking, R. (2014). Predictors of successful transition from school to employment for youth with disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 25, 223-234 (2014).

¹² See NCI Data Brief and NCI 2016-17 Final Report, n. ii.