

Sheltered Workshops

The effort to move all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities into community settings regardless of need and choice is not confined to residential services. There is a push as well to move individuals who benefit from sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs into competitive employment. In these settings, people with disabilities work beside non-disabled people, making at least minimum wage.

Oftentimes, supports are required to ensure a successful work experience for the individual with a disability. Proponents of “supported employment” contend that as long as the appropriate supports are in place, the goal of “real” employment should be achievable for everyone with a disability.

According to the federal Developmental Disabilities Act:

“The term ‘supported employment services’ means services that enable individuals with developmental disabilities to perform competitive work in integrated work settings, in the case of individuals with developmental disabilities

- *for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred; or*
- *for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of significant disabilities; and*
- *who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, need intensive supported employment services or extended services in order to perform such work.”*

VOR supports supported employment services in community settings for individuals who are capable of working in this capacity and can benefit from these services.

To be successful, programs and services for people with disabilities, whether residential or employment focused, must be based on individual choice, need and capabilities. For many participants, sheltered workshops are more than a job or a means of making money. The programs provide them with responsibility, structure and the opportunity to achieve and to measure their own skills and to work at improving them.

VOR asserts that sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs are also supported employment services. These programs allow individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who cannot handle community settings to pursue their skills and interests in the most integrated setting possible according to their needs and capabilities.

For many of the people who are being closed out of sheltered workshops and who are not able to find opportunities in the open market, there is no program in place to meet their needs. Often, the only alternative is a day program designed for less-abled individuals. In many cases, the lack of a sheltered workshop means more time in front

of the television, as many of the group homes are not staffed sufficiently to fill this void with a sufficient amount of constructive activities.

A study by the Chimes Foundation reveals the importance of maintaining this continuum. The study, conducted by the George Washington University, summarizes the impact of converting all sheltered workshops to integrated employment in Maine. The harmful effects of shutting down higher levels of care can be seen in the study's response to three research questions that addressed the policy impact to disabled individuals. The study found:

1. There was no increase in integrated employment after sheltered workshops were closed. Individuals now spend more time in non-work activities and those who do work have the shortest average work week in the country for individuals with disabilities.
2. The majority of individuals who were transitioned out of sheltered workshops to integrated work from 2002 - 2007 were no longer employed in 2014 or were working fewer hours.
3. Wages per hour increased for individuals working in integrated employment, but total wages earned are down because individuals work fewer hours per week. Many individuals are no longer employed.

<http://www.chimes.org/news/20150622.htm>

Sheltered workshops provide a much needed service to the I/DD population, and are an important part of the continuum of care for the I/DD community.

VOR believes that there is a place for both integrated and facility-based employment services as we as a society provide for the full continuum of care for individuals with disabilities as required by the U.S. Supreme Court Olmstead decision.