



Pathways to Careers

A Case Study in Customized Employment

Prepared by SourceAmerica with support from Mathematica

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Executive Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic created a devastating public health crisis and wreaked havoc on the U.S. economy. As America looks to build back in the wake of these historic events, there is a choice to be made: return to the status quo or move forward in a way that taps into the full economic potential of the American workforce.

SourceAmerica® has been a leading job creator for people with disabilities for more than 45 years. It has a nationwide network of community-based nonprofit agencies and has seen firsthand what works – and what doesn't – when it comes to disability employment and inclusion. One of the most promising paths for improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is through customized employment (CE). CE refers to competitive integrated employment (CIE) for individuals with a significant disability and focuses on their talents and interests as well as the supports they would need to succeed in the workplace. It also takes into account employers' needs and business objectives. In short, it matches the right person to the right job and provides them with the support they need to succeed.



Research shows that disability inclusion benefits employers as well as employees and leads to – among other things – increased innovation and productivity in the workplace. Tapping into the potential of people with disabilities to contribute to the workforce improves the economy at local, state, and national levels. Despite these factors, CE is often overlooked in the federal and state policymaking arenas when disability employment legislation and funding are on the table. SourceAmerica is working to change that.

This report provides a snapshot of outcomes from SourceAmerica's Pathways to Careers® (Pathways), a multi-year project and CE service model that connected people with significant intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) and people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to competitive integrated employment. Pathways, which started in 2012, was responsive to the system change efforts laid out under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Report content includes CE lessons learned and recommendations for moving forward. These findings are the direct result of Pathways, which encompassed a total of four demonstration sites (Clearfield, UT; Detroit, MI; Oakton, VA; and Dorchester, MA), engaged over 300 employer partners, and made possible an overwhelming number of employment success stories. Through the Pathways program, more than 170 individuals with significant barriers to employment received inclusive jobs with full wages, benefits, and opportunities for future advancement.

In keeping with its commitment to share resources and best practices, SourceAmerica worked with Mathematica to create a [robust library of publications](#) related to Pathways and CE. This report is the latest addition to that collection.

The findings contained in this report describe staff experiences at the four SourceAmerica Pathways demonstration sites and detail what was learned about CE and its potential impacts on people with disabilities. These findings are based on qualitative data collected by Mathematica from Pathways agency staff through interviews conducted in December 2020 and January 2021, programmatic information received from Pathways managers through December 2020, and participant surveys conducted through July 2020.



The intent of publishing this information is to demonstrate the potential for CE service models to significantly improve the quality of employment outcomes experienced by people with disabilities. This potential can only be reached through purposeful action by state and federal policymakers. Specifically, legislators must include funding for CE capacity building and service delivery in disability employment policy such as the proposed Customized Approaches to Providing and Building Independent Lives of Inclusion for Transition-aged Youth (CAPABILITY) Act of 2019. This bill, informed by Pathways and championed by SourceAmerica and other leading voices in the disability community, should be reintroduced and passed to demonstrate a national commitment to an inclusive recovery from the events of 2020–2021. State legislatures should use the principles of

the CAPABILITY Act as a model to identify and commit the level of investment necessary to secure a better future for people with disabilities seeking competitive integrated employment. This report will provide policymakers with the information they need to make the right decisions at this critical time in America's history.

Lessons Learned

SourceAmerica launched Pathways to Careers at demonstration sites in various localities to explore how best to implement CE in different geographic settings and nonprofit agency environments. SourceAmerica is leveraging these lessons to improve upon its service offerings and expand its reach and impact as a technical center for CE service delivery, a collaborator with state and federal agencies and academic institutions, and an advocate for essential policies needed to drive significant improvement in the employment situation of people with disabilities. An overview of the main themes that emerged is below.

CE offers one of the most promising paths for improving employment outcomes for people with significant disabilities.

Staff at each of the Pathways demonstration sites emphasized the importance of CE in matching people who had experienced some of the greatest barriers to employment to the right job. They reported that Pathways helped reach and engage people with acute support needs who were not served by standard employment services, had been told they could not work in the past, or would otherwise be served in day support or facility-based employment settings. Many people previously left out of the workforce found employment through Pathways – some for the first time in their lives – highlighting how effective CE is at helping those with significant disabilities secure employment. Though the scale of the demonstration project was small in terms of the staggering number of people with disabilities who are out of the workforce, Pathways serves as a model for achieving the outcomes envisioned by WIOA if the necessary resources are in place.

There is no one-size-fits-all model. Flexibility is a key to success.

Successful implementation of CE best practices must take into account the local context, including the unique features of the agency delivering CE, the local labor market, and regional factors. For example, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency reimbursement rates and Medicaid Day Waiver rates differ widely across states. Local economic conditions and employment practices may also influence the effectiveness of CE best practices. These and other factors come into play in the delivery of CE services. Therefore, flexibility is the key to success. This includes not just adjusting the approach to navigate state and local needs and requirements, but also adjusting elements, such as the timing and mode of training, as needed. While the core principles of CE are rooted in evidence-based practice, there needs to be flexibility in the implementation of those core principles by service providers. SourceAmerica's experience with Pathways also demonstrates the need for state systems to adapt funding models and reimbursement rates in response to the higher standard of service needed to achieve competitive integrated employment outcomes.

A sustainable funding stream is needed to expand offerings and maximize outcomes.

Pathways demonstration sites used a patchwork of various funding sources to sustain their CE activities. Funding needs were compounded by other challenges, including difficulties recruiting and retaining staff; the need to adjust service delivery models due to a variety of unexpected developments, such as the COVID 19 pandemic; and countering ongoing misconceptions regarding people with disabilities and the value they bring to the workforce. Having a sustainable funding stream in place for CE activities will enable providers to focus more fully on delivering consistent high-quality CE services and achieving the desired outcomes.

Investments in CE have the potential to pay for themselves.

Pathways connected people with significant disabilities to high-quality jobs that were aligned with their interests and offered opportunities for long-term career advancement. Participants' starting hourly wages averaged close to \$11 (in 2019 dollars), and they planned to work 23 hours per week, on average, leading to more than one-third (38 percent) of employed participants with planned monthly earnings at or above the Substantial Gainful Activity level. In response to increased earnings, some Pathways participants were able to reduce their reliance on federal disability benefits. While longer study is needed, investments in the development and implementation of CE may pay for themselves in the long run, especially if they are targeted to young adults who are potentially looking at many years of dependence on public income and other support programs. The ideal outcome for a significant improvement in the employment situation of people with disabilities is a virtuous economic cycle where individuals are able to rise out of poverty, and local, state, and federal governments reduce the cost of ongoing supports. SourceAmerica's experience with Pathways demonstrates that such an outcome may be possible on a broader scale if policymakers recognize the economic and social gains that could be made through investment in evidence-based CE services.



Recommendations

Based on its experience with Pathways and its long-time engagement in CE, SourceAmerica recommends the following policy actions for Congress and state lawmakers:

Re-introduce the CAPABILITY ACT. The CAPABILITY Act of 2019 addressed the critical need for CE models that maximize the skills and talents of America's youth with disabilities. The CAPABILITY Act was designed to launch programs resulting in customized work opportunities that expand access to fair-wage jobs in integrated workplaces and promote independent living and modern job skills. In support of WIOA and the recognition that we must act today to address intergenerational poverty and the exclusion of the next generation of people with disabilities, the CAPABILITY Act targeted funding for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities or autism transitioning from school to the workforce.

Key components of the CAPABILITY Act, informed by SourceAmerica's experiences with Pathways, included:

- The delivery of evidence-based services to transition-aged youth with disabilities;
- Dedicated funding to build capacity within provider organizations and promote long-term sustainability;
- Development of models for replication in other states; and
- Competition across states for funding based on their ability to steward resources to provider organizations and maintain high standards for outcome evaluation.

The CAPABILITY Act aligns with state funding patterns as well as other recent legislative efforts related to CE. It is in keeping with the idea that whether policy changes are targeted to the state level or federal level, CE interventions should translate into more people achieving the CIE outcomes expected in modern society.

Federal Action: The 117th Congress should take action to reintroduce, build bipartisan support for, and pass the CAPABILITY Act as a demonstration of commitment to the millions of Americans with disabilities who are disconnected from the labor market, as well as those who are working yet still in a state of poverty. Through a targeted focus on transition-aged youth, the principles of the CAPABILITY Act can create a new foundation for achieving CIE outcomes and economic and social mobility for people with disabilities. A successful demonstration of results from the CAPABILITY Act should lead to expanded services that appropriately support all demographics represented in the disability community.

State Action: State legislatures should use the CAPABILITY Act as a blueprint to develop new policies that invest in the future of their economies and constituents. State leaders must recognize that the cycle of exclusion and poverty experienced by people with disabilities must be broken. Policymakers within states have the unique opportunity to lead the way through innovative approaches that can shape national trends. SourceAmerica also urges governors to advance models such as the CAPABILITY Act through their leadership and support executive actions that specifically benefit the employment of people with disabilities through CE.

Include CE in policy planning and discussions: CE is often overlooked in policymaking discussions about disability employment. As America looks to a future where CIE for people with disabilities is the norm rather than the exception, CE must be part of the conversation. It should not be an afterthought when it comes to funding programs for people with disabilities, creating regulations and policies that impact people with disabilities, and developing economic recovery efforts. Lawmakers at the federal and state levels should ensure that CE services and accompanying funding are consistently included in employment legislation impacting people with disabilities.

Pathways to Careers

Summary of Intervention

The Pathways to Careers project provided people with I/DD and people with ASD an informed choice about CIE opportunities that are aligned with their skills, interests, strengths, and abilities. Pathways used a CE service model that matched people with significant disabilities to career opportunities in the community with the goal of increasing sustainable CIE outcomes. The model incorporated five key service components: Discovery, expanded Discovery and paid internships, employment supports, employment, and post-employment career support. Participation in Pathways was based on a zero-exclusion philosophy that presumes all people can achieve employment.



Discovery is a strengths-based assessment of Pathways participants that focuses on identifying the interests, skills, and conditions for success for each participant.



Paid internships enable Pathways participants to try different job responsibilities and determine whether the job is a suitable placement for them. Pathways, rather than the employer, provides salary, benefits, and initial employment supports.



Customized employer relationships help meet the needs of both job seekers and employers by negotiating job duties and flexible work arrangements.

SourceAmerica launched the Pathways pilot in 2012 and expanded to three other demonstration sites between 2015 and 2018. Implementing partners included:

PARC, a ServiceSource affiliate (PARC), in Clearfield, Utah. Participants were randomly selected from applicants from three sources: students enrolled in the Davis School District special education school transition programs, individuals working in PARC's facility-based employment program, and individuals who were on the Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD) waiting list for Medicaid waiver-funded services.

JVS Human Services (JVS) in Detroit, Michigan. Pathways, which began at JVS in 2015, is integrated into the organization's rehabilitation services unit. Initially, JVS partnered with Macomb County's office of Michigan Rehabilitation Services (the state's Vocational Rehabilitation agency) to recruit participants for Pathways. After Pathways launched, JVS worked with the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, which helped to establish a fee schedule between JVS, MRS, and community mental health agencies.

WORK Inc. in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Pathways launched at [WORK Inc.](#) in 2015. Participants were referred to Pathways through the Department of Developmental Services, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (the state's VR agency), and WORK Inc.'s community-based day services program.

ServiceSource in Oakton, Virginia. Pathways implementation began at [ServiceSource](#) in 2015. Participants were referred to Pathways through ServiceSource's autism program, called Autism Bridge to Learn and Empower, and ServiceSource's day support program, the Employment, Resource and Community Integration Center (ERCIC). Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) offices in Alexandria and Fairfax, Virginia, also provided referrals to Pathways and funded some services.

Mathematica has conducted an independent evaluation of Pathways under contract to SourceAmerica, resulting in several evaluation reports, case studies, forums, and other publications. The interviews referenced in this report were conducted by Mathematica.

Participant Characteristics

Pathways targeted services and supports to people with significant disabilities, many of whom were previously employed in facility-based settings and later thrived in competitive employment secured through Pathways. Individuals were eligible if they were 18 or older, had a primary diagnosis of I/DD or ASD, and resided in one of the Pathways service areas. Across the demonstration sites, a total of 173 participants enrolled in Pathways, meaning they applied to the program and were randomly selected to participate. About 70 percent of participants reported an I/DD as their primary or secondary disability, and 40 percent reported ASD as their primary or secondary disability. At the time of application, Pathways participants were 28 years old, on average; about two-thirds of participants had obtained a high school diploma, GED, or certificate of completion; and about three-quarters lived with their parents or guardians. Participants were referred to Pathways by local school systems, provider sites, and rehabilitation agencies.

Successes and Challenges Implementing Pathways

The findings in this section are based primarily on qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with Pathways staff in December 2020 and January 2021. Pathways staff were asked to identify the key successes and challenges they encountered when implementing Pathways and how the experience shaped their organization's programming and strategies for service delivery. Below is a summary of each site's successes, challenges, and impact from implementing Pathways.

"Before [Pathways], we were getting them [participants] jobs, but we were not getting them careers... These services are really what's right for people...Through Discovery, we identify who this person is and what works for them that is meaningful...[Pathways] is the right approach to providing the best services to people...I worked in [a] community employment program for many years and saw that we could do this better. This is the better approach. These concepts work for people and for employers. [Pathways] is an investment up front, but it's a win-win for everyone."

A. PARC

PARC was the first agency to partner with SourceAmerica to implement Pathways. Individuals were eligible for Pathways in the pilot site if they were 18 or older, had a primary diagnosis of I/DD or ASD, and resided in Davis County, Utah. Pathways recruited participants from PARC's facility-based employment program, the Davis School District transition programs, and the waiting list for the Medicaid Community Supports Waiver for individuals with an intellectual disability or other related conditions. The site enrolled 91 participants, 59 of whom were matched to jobs through 2020.

Successes and challenges encountered

PARC staff reported that Pathways created opportunities for staff to make "fantastic job matches" for individuals who would otherwise not have been working in competitive employment. Many of the job matches were high-quality jobs that offered participants career advancement. According to PARC staff, the internships were powerful and were the biggest determiner in participants getting hired. The internships offered during expanded Discovery gave both participants and employers a greater experience base from which

to make decisions about employment. The internships also allowed employers to directly observe participants in the work setting and determine whether the job was a good fit for the individual. Compared to VR clients who are expected to secure employment within 90 days, identifying successful job matches for Pathways participants was a longer process because of the time it took to complete Discovery and job development. However, many participants who were matched to jobs through Pathways have had long tenures in their positions.

PARC staff cited key challenges related to the training model and high turnover among staff. The first touched on the fact that Pathways training was extensive due to its high-quality and in-depth nature. Although nonprofit agencies wanted to serve people as soon as possible, having untrained staff would have created additional issues. The PARC Pathways team also referenced experiencing high staff turnover and reported that they were in a continual mode of training, certifying, and onboarding new staff.

Pathways effects on programming and strategies

PARC leadership pursued private, federal, and state sources of funding to support ongoing delivery of Pathways services. PARC's funding streams come from the state VR agency, the state 1915(c) Medicaid HCBS waiver for people with an intellectual disability or related conditions, and a private foundation board. Over time, PARC staff opened a line of communication about Pathways with each funding entity and then wove together a braided funding strategy from these sources to support implementation of Pathways services. The infusion of outside funds mostly covers internship and job development, but funds also cover supports provided to participants after they secure employment.



B. WORK Inc.

WORK Inc., located in Dorchester, Massachusetts, launched Pathways in 2015. WORK Inc. established connections with several government and community organizations, including the Department of Developmental Services (DDS); the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, which administers state VR services; and the WORK Inc. board. These connections led to referrals into the program, strengthened bonds with the community, and fostered employer relationships to further the goals of Pathways.

Successes and challenges encountered

WORK Inc. staff cited participants' securing employment as the biggest program success. According to staff, many people have found work through Pathways, some for the first time in their lives, highlighting how effective CE is at connecting those with significant disabilities to employment. When asked what key factors contribute to Pathways working well for a given participant, WORK Inc. staff reported that the participant must want to work and be open to having their benefits reduced if they earn high enough wages. It also helps if they possess a skill set they want to utilize and build on in the workplace and that fills a business need. WORK Inc. staff shared a story of a participant who had previously worked for 20 years in a facility-based employment setting. The participant enrolled in Pathways and completed an internship at a day care. She was later hired to work at a different day care where she has worked for four years. The participant reportedly loves her job, and the staff have embraced her as part of their community.

WORK Inc. staff noted that one of the main challenges encountered was managing staff turnover. Staffing challenges were compounded by the fact that new staff required extensive upfront training in order to ensure they were prepared to deliver the level of service needed.

"Pathways is not for everyone, but for those who could benefit from receiving individualized supports, Pathways has been powerful."

Pathways effects on programming and strategies

Participating in Pathways shaped WORK Inc.'s programming by laying the groundwork for future initiatives. According to WORK Inc. staff, the agency has always been open to piloting and "pressure testing" new approaches to delivering employment services to their population. Agency leadership viewed Pathways as an opportunity to pilot test CE concepts within their agency to further promote employment for people with disabilities.

In 2020, WORK Inc. was awarded a systems change grant to design and implement a new CE service model in the state of Rhode Island. The program, called Customized Employment Options, is funded by Rhode Island's Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals. Services are designed for a Department of Justice consent decree population who have never had paid community-based employment. According to staff, the agency's experience implementing Pathways positioned it well to pursue this grant opportunity. The agency is incorporating elements of Pathways as it designs and implements the new program. Specifically, WORK Inc. is building into the new program a person-centered philosophy that puts the individual in the "driver's seat." Also, like Pathways, the new program is using a holistic strengths-based approach when providing Discovery and job development to help individuals pursue their work goals. The new program is also offering paid internships to those participants who would like to take advantage of this opportunity. To support this effort, WORK Inc. has engaged the Institute for Community Inclusion for technical assistance and Marc Gold & Associates to provide gateway trainings for new staff. Participating in Pathways not only provided WORK Inc. with expertise and insights into the value of CE for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce, but it also opened up new business opportunities for the organization.

WORK Inc. utilized Pathways to serve individuals who were deaf and experiencing mental health issues. Due to the needs of this population, it was necessary for the organization to employ interpreters and to continue to provide mental health-related supports to participants. WORK Inc.'s experience highlights the flexibility of the Pathways model and its capacity to help participants with unique circumstances find employment.

C. JVS Human Services

SourceAmerica expanded Pathways to Detroit, Michigan in 2015. The Pathways site, operated through JVS, started as a school-to-work program for post-high-school young adults in Macomb County in the northern metro area of Detroit. Since launching Pathways, JVS has enrolled 26 participants, 15 of whom have secured employment through 2020. The Detroit Pathways team expanded services to include several individuals from counties that were outside of the initial service site in Macomb County.

Successes and challenges encountered

JVS staff cited two key Pathways successes. First, they measured success in job matches, which they had achieved for more than half of the enrolled Pathways participants through 2020. JVS staff attributed their success in achieving long-lasting, satisfying job matches to Pathways' individualized approach. Second, staff stated that they were able to re-engage individuals and families who were previously not engaged in seeking employment because they were told that they could not work. According to JVS staff, Pathways and new referrals from VR due to the Pathways model served as an avenue to direct these individuals toward employment goals. For example, staff reported that some parents or family members who had previously dismissed employment as an option for people who had struggled with traditional supported employment were willing to try Pathways because of the individualized approach to service delivery. In particular, they believed the Discovery process helped participants to "come alive" and consider their strengths and abilities in a new way before they began seeking job opportunities.

JVS staff noted that the program launched smoothly due to strong coordination between SourceAmerica and state VR managers. However, JVS staff recalled needing to overcome VR expectations based on their experience with a CE project several years earlier that had loosely structured administrative processes and evaluation, and thus had many operational challenges. To convince VR to partner with them, JVS focused on the distinctions between the old project and the Pathways project.

Pathways effects on programming and strategies

JVS staff view CE as an integral offering in their suite of services. This was not the case prior to participating in Pathways. Now, it is an avenue for people who might not benefit from other services to obtain employment. According to Pathways staff, the program helped state VR agency staff view CE as an option to help all individuals achieve customized integrated employment. Previously, the individuals who would most likely benefit from CE would not have been referred by VR for employment services.

The site continued expanding some Pathways elements to other departments within JVS, including employment planning meetings and facilitation. Employment planning meetings, which take place at the end of Discovery, reportedly empower job seekers; increase buy-in from all stakeholders, such as job seekers, family members, and agency staff; and reduce obstacles by discussing and planning next steps and specific job leads together. Parts of facilitation or coaching, such as job analysis or identifying natural supports in the workplace, can be applied to many services that JVS offers. JVS staff reported that facilitation training also increased staff job satisfaction and retention, which they attributed to their staff reporting higher efficacy in their work due to the training.

Another Pathways element, paid internships, may also continue. According to JVS staff, some individuals benefit from internships if it allows them to try out different job responsibilities and boosts their confidence. Internships can also help employers determine whether the job is a suitable match for a given participant. JVS staff reported that those with previous work experience most often prefer being directly matched to a job. VR provides funding for some internships if JVS staff make the case that an internship is best for an individual before they are matched to a job.

Although VR funds the majority of CE activities, JVS staff noted that it is not sufficient to cover the entire cost of delivering these individualized services. JVS currently uses philanthropic funding to fill the funding gaps that VR is not able to cover for Discovery and job development. Because JVS believes strongly in offering CE, they expect they will continue to use philanthropic funding for this purpose.

D. ServiceSource

SourceAmerica expanded Pathways to Oakton, Virginia (a suburb of Washington, D.C.) in 2015. The Pathways site, operated through ServiceSource, enrolled 25 participants, 15 of whom have secured employment through 2020. Participants were referred from ServiceSource's day support and autism programs and the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

"At this point in time we see the concept of customized employment as an integral part of our service delivery program, which it wasn't seven years ago... this definitely needs to continually be part of our repertoire as something that we offer because for some people this is the way that they're going to have a placement outcome. That to me is the most significant part [of how Pathways affected JVS' strategies for service delivery] – it is an integral part of our service delivery system. It's there, it's important, it's just part of who we are now."



Successes and challenges encountered

ServiceSource staff believe the Pathways model allowed them to serve individuals who would not otherwise have had employment opportunities. CE in general and the specific components of the Pathways model reportedly offered a better route to successfully serve individuals who would have had difficulty obtaining jobs through traditional supported employment. Pathways provided the means for ServiceSource to fill a previously unmet service need. It also enabled the organization to find jobs for those who have more acute support needs and that align with their individualized skills and abilities.

Participating in the Pathways demonstration allowed staff to gain substantial knowledge and experience in providing CE services, which helped the organization become a leader in delivering CE in Northern Virginia. Through Pathways, staff received extensive training and resources to successfully implement the model several years before the state VR agency began to offer training and reimbursement for CE.

Among the challenges cited by ServiceSource staff were the difficulties they experienced developing partnership agreements with employers and scheduling staff for the trainings, particularly when travel was required. This is another example of the unique experiences of each agency in implementing Pathways, and it underscores the need for incorporating flexibility into the program design moving forward.

Pathways effects on programming and strategies

Participating in Pathways has affected ServiceSource's programming and strategies in several ways. Prior to Pathways, staff reported that they never went into people's homes or served them in the community – participants came to the agency to receive services. Through operating Pathways, ServiceSource staff found that working with people in the community is a great way to observe them in a real-world setting and is a key factor in determining what the person's skills and conditions for success are and what types of jobs might be a good fit. ServiceSource staff have also retained use of some of the Pathways components, including the career plan for job development. Finally, ServiceSource's experience with Pathways has allowed it to work more with the state Medicaid agency, serving more individuals with complex support needs through a Medicaid waiver. ServiceSource staff reported that when the state agency didn't fund internships, it impeded their ability to continue providing the full suite of Pathways offerings once funding from SourceAmerica was no longer available.

Qualitative Lessons Learned from Pathways Implementation

Pathways program managers and other staff were asked about implementation successes and challenges. This included questions about how Pathways affected their agency's service delivery, funding strategies, and plans for sustaining CE after implementing Pathways. Highlights of their responses are below.

Pathways matched participants with acute support needs to job opportunities. All of the Pathways demonstration sites emphasized the importance of CE in matching people with significant needs to job opportunities that were a good fit for them. Staff noted that Pathways helped reach people with acute support needs who were not served by standard employment services, had been told that they could not work in the past, or would otherwise be served in day support or facility-based employment settings. Staff at PARC and WORK Inc. noted that unlike rapid placement strategies, the Pathways model takes more staff investment but yields better fitting jobs that individuals are more likely to retain.

Staff perceived trainings to be high quality but conveyed mixed views about the timing, intensity, and mode of the trainings. Although Pathways staff perceived trainings to be high quality, they recommended greater flexibility in the timing and mode of training offerings. Having to travel out of state or adhere to strict training schedules also made onboarding more difficult. PARC and JVS staff noted that there was a steep learning curve to CE, and it took up to six months to equip new staff to carry their own caseloads. JVS relied on external funding to train new staff and had them shadow other staff members until they were able to carry their own caseload. This timeframe exacerbated extended waits for training that the provider offered, which in some cases is only available once a quarter. JVS staff noted that

training providers are not interchangeable because they use different models and are not all reimbursed by the state. As such, new staff often had to wait months for a particular required training. ServiceSource staff suggested offering training virtually and including more recordings.

Agencies flexibly adapted the service model to their program and local context. Pathways sites increased flexibility when implementing components of the service model. For example, JVS staff noted that while internships can be useful for people without work experience, many participants and employers were ready to move directly to employment; internships are now only used in some cases. Also, ServiceSource shifted to informal partnerships rather than signing memorandums of understanding with employers, who were often uncomfortable entering into formal agreements.

“In talking with individuals who struggled previously in traditional supported employment about the customized approach, they were willing to re-engage with VR. Whereas previously in having some struggles – their parents or family members had said, ‘I don’t think employment is a viable option for my son or daughter,’ until hearing about the individual approach of Pathways, and then they were willing to give it a try again.”

Pathways sites developed braided funding strategies to sustain customized employment. All of the agencies participating in Pathways plan to continue offering CE services by combining multiple funding sources. Although JVS had previously offered some CE services, many staff noted that Pathways helped shift the agency culture toward opening more opportunities for people with disabilities. This included re-engaging people and families who are not work-oriented, moving VR counselors toward a presumption that employment services would benefit a broader array of individuals, and seeking higher quality jobs and careers that fit individuals’ skills and interests.

Pathways staff at each site braided multiple funding sources to support implementation of the program. In addition to securing private and federal funding, Pathways sites partnered with state VR agencies that referred participants and partially reimbursed select services at each of the sites. Several agency staff offered suggestions for ways state VR agencies could fund CE. JVS and ServiceSource suggested funding each component of CE (e.g., Discovery, internships, job development, training, and retention) separately to clearly define standards for each activity and allow teams to work together, rather than expecting an individual job developer to complete each component. For smaller teams or agencies beginning to offer CE services, the upfront investment can be particularly challenging.

Moving forward, all of the agencies plan to use different components of the Pathways model to meet the needs of their diverse populations and leverage available funding. For example, PARC has used foundation funding to pay for up to two internships after SourceAmerica funding expired, and JVS has used philanthropic funding to fill funding gaps in VR reimbursement for Discovery and job development. ServiceSource planned to continue using some elements, such as the career plan and job development, but not internships. WORK Inc. planned to fold some elements of Pathways and its person-centered philosophy into new services they will offer in Rhode Island, but overall they plan to take an approach that is more closely adapted to their needs.

Demonstration Outcomes

Service receipt outcomes were examined among all Pathways participants with data available as of December 2020. From May 2012 to November 2019, the Pathways sites enrolled 173 participants, of which 159 completed Discovery and nearly three-quarters (74 percent) completed at least one internship. Pathways internships provided a valuable foundation for participants and gave them an opportunity to experience one or more roles to help them choose a career that was right for them. There were 236 internship placements in total, and on average, participants engaged in 2.1 internships, with a number of these roles maturing into permanent employment. Overall, 97 participants (or 56 percent) secured permanent employment. The average tenure for permanent employment through December 2020

exceeded two years (25.9 months). On average, the jobs paid \$10.88 per hour, and participants earned \$1,083 per month. More than one-third of participants (37.5 percent) obtained competitive employment with monthly earnings that, on average, exceeded the Substantial Gainful Activity level.¹ For Pathways participants who are SSI or SSDI beneficiaries, sustained earnings at this level could eventually reduce their disability benefits to zero.

Outcomes at a Glance



159

Number of participants who completed Discovery



236

Number of completed internships

74.2%

of participants completed an internship



97

Number of participants secured competitive employment

25.9

Average tenure (in months) in competitive employment



Employment

56.1

Percentage of Pathways participants who secured competitive employment through Pathways



Hours

23.0

Average planned hours per week of Pathways participants in competitive employment



Wages

\$11

Average hourly wages of Pathways participants in competitive employment



Earnings

\$249

Average planned weekly earnings of Pathways participants in competitive employment



SGA

37.5

Percentage of Pathways participants with planned monthly earnings at or above SGA level

Source: Calculations based on data from the Pathways Management Information System through May 2020 (WORK, Inc.), June 2020 (PARC), September 2020 (JVS and ServiceSource), and November 2020 (EnableUtah).

Notes: The sample includes 173 Pathways participants. Wages and earnings are in 2019 dollars. Calculations for internships exclude four individuals who completed Discovery but dropped out shortly thereafter.

SGA = substantial gainful activity

¹ The Substantial Gainful Activity level in 2019 was \$1,220.

Costs and Savings

In 2017, Mathematica conducted a formal cost analysis of Pathways (Denny-Brown et al. 2018). The findings indicate that average annual per-participant costs were about \$12,000 (\$15,000 when selected overhead costs that may not be generally applicable to other programs are included). The average cost of serving Pathways participants from intake to employment among those who became employed was about \$24,000. Given the potential for large average lifetime public expenditures associated with SSI and SSDI beneficiaries with I/DD and ASD (Riley and Rupp 2015), substantial and effective investments in paid work experiences and career development might pay for themselves in the long run, especially if they are targeted to young adults who are potentially looking at many years of dependence on public income and other support programs.

To place the costs into context, consider the Pathways costs incurred from intake to employment alongside the outcomes observed at the 12-, 24-, 36-, 48-, and 60-month follow-up surveys. Those findings indicate that average earnings increased substantially among participants and continued to increase over time. The large earnings increases were accompanied by substantial declines in average monthly Social Security disability benefits. The average monthly declines in Social Security disability benefits also increased over time, ranging from \$251 or 28 percent at 12 months after intake to \$335 or about 40 percent by 60 months after intake. If these savings to the federal government approximate the impacts of the program, they would need to be sustained for about eight years (about nine years if overhead costs are included) for the program costs to outweigh the savings to SSA. Less time would be required for the program to be considered cost beneficial if savings to public programs other than SSI and SSDI accrue. Viewed from another perspective, if the 60-month outcomes observed to date are indicative of the potential impacts of the program, and if such impacts can be sustained, the average 40 percent reductions in SSI and SSDI cash benefits translate into average lifetime reductions of about \$75,000 per participant (present value).²

Moving the Pathways Program Forward: Expanding Services and Refining CE Offerings

SourceAmerica continues exploring smaller scale expansion of Pathways services and collecting information and data to further refine these offerings. These expansion efforts include supporting an additional provider in Utah and providing intensive, fee-based training to another agency in Kentucky. Moving forward, SourceAmerica will continue to leverage its learnings in CE and to serve as a resource for nonprofit agencies and others interested in CE services. An overview of Pathways implementation at two expansion sites is below.

A. EnableUtah

In 2018, [EnableUtah](#) expressed interest in adopting Pathways services. EnableUtah enrolled seven participants, five of whom have secured employment through 2020. All participants were referred from the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR), which is the state VR agency.

Successes and challenges encountered

The Pathways site, operated through EnableUtah, has built many connections with community employers, which staff attribute to educating employers about Pathways, about employing people with disabilities in general, and about supports available to employers. Word-of-mouth connections between employers have also helped forge new partnerships.

² This estimate is based on the average lifetime SSI, SSDI, Medicare, and Medicaid expenditure for beneficiaries with intellectual disability (\$472,913 in 2012 dollars, present value), and the share of these expenditures represented by SSI and SSDI cash benefits (36 percent or \$170,249), as reported in Riley and Rupp (2015). The estimate provided in the text above represents 40 percent of this value, adjusted to 2019 dollars.



Although numerous participants have been placed in successful internships in the community, staff report that many employers are hesitant to hire the workers at the conclusion of their internships. One of the reasons cited by employers is the difficulty of navigating their own HR systems. In response, EnableUtah staff modified internship offerings and started re-evaluating internships after 30, 60, or 90 days to identify any issues and keep communication open with employers.

In addition, EnableUtah staff reported great value in the training and resources offered by SourceAmerica. A half-dozen staff were involved in a series of these comprehensive CE trainings. SourceAmerica encouraged the participation of state VR counselors in training activities, and staff reported that this inclusion facilitated the successful implementation of Pathways at EnableUtah.

Pathways effects on programming and strategies

Staff at EnableUtah reported that VR has become increasingly interested in CE and that Pathways has shifted the focus for individuals, families, staff, and VR counselors from limitations to abilities and opened more employment possibilities to consider. EnableUtah staff said that elements of the Discovery process (such as seeing individuals in everyday settings and getting to know them more before finding job matches) will continue in the future. The site expects that funding from the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD), which administers state Medicaid waiver services for this population, would fill in the gaps for continuous funding after VR funding runs out for many individuals. EnableUtah has received some DSPD funding in the past but plans to utilize it more to continue offering CE services. EnableUtah reports strengthened communication with, and additional referrals from, funding agencies as another positive outcome of their ongoing experience with Pathways.

B. Edge Employment

Edge Employment is a CE provider that uses Social Role Valorization as a guide to securing gainful employment for individuals with disabilities. Edge Employment is not a SourceAmerica affiliate, but it shares many common goals and principles with Pathways. Edge Employment reached out to the Pathways team to request training and resources.

Edge Employment is the employment arm of Mattingly Edge and has a long-standing commitment in customized employment. Both Pathways and Edge Employment believe CE offers a promising path forward for the future of employment services.

Conclusion

SourceAmerica's Pathways to Careers program provides unique and valuable insights into how to tap into the potential of CE for people with disabilities. SourceAmerica views these lessons learned as a foundational first step. The organization is building on this base by implementing additional CE-focused programs, expanding the delivery of CE-related training, and educating key stakeholders, including policymakers, about CE benefits and best practices. More specifically, SourceAmerica is continuing to gather input from organizations and individuals participating in Pathways; implementing a web-based learning management system that provides technical assistance and training modules from SourceAmerica staff and other national experts; reaching out to college programs, employers, and other potential community partners to increase awareness about CE and discuss the implications of Pathways success; providing financial supports in the form of grants to service providers who want to adopt CE services as a strategy for transformation; and fostering collaborations and partnerships with other state and local agencies.

SourceAmerica is committed to continuing to lead on CE-related efforts and to advocate for programs and policies that promote and facilitate CE and the full inclusion of people with disabilities into the workforce. For more information on the Pathways program; additional research, including Mathematica publications; insight into how proposed policies might impact people with disabilities; and other CE information, contact SourceAmerica's Workforce Development Team at (571) 226-4660.

Appendix

Dissemination activities and reports published by Mathematica

- Report executive summary May 26, 2017: [The SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers Demonstration in Utah: Interim Evaluation Report Executive Summary](#)
- Memo March 2017: Utah Pathways Cost Estimates
- Issue brief April 30, 2017: [Pathways to Careers Employer Case Study: Futura Industries](#)
- Report May 30, 2017: [Policy Changes for SourceAmerica Nonprofit Agencies: Impacts of Eliminating Section 14\(c\) and Reducing AbilityOne's Required Direct Labor Ratio](#)
- Issue brief August 31, 2017: [Pathways to Careers Employer Case Study: Davis School District](#)
- Fact sheet November 30, 2017: [Evaluation of the SourceAmerica® Pathways to Careers™ Program \(Fact Sheet\)](#)
- Webinar December 5, 2017: [A Framework for Achieving Competitive Integrated Employment: Findings from the SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers Evaluation](#)
- Report executive summary March 16, 2018: [The SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers™ Demonstration Pilot in Utah: Interim Evaluation Report, Executive Summary](#)
- Research brief April 30, 2019: [Expanding Integrated Employment: Early Lessons from Scaling Up Pathways to Careers](#)
- Research brief August 30, 2019: [Customized Employment: Translating Policy Into Practice Through SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers](#)
- Fact sheet August 30, 2019: [Customized Employment: Translating Policy into Practice Through SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers \(Fact Sheet\)](#)
- Podcast February 26, 2020: [Lessons from Scaling a Customized Employment Program for Workers with Disabilities](#)
- Webinar September 24, 2020: [Expanding Integrated Employment: Lessons Learned from Scaling Up Pathways to Careers](#)

References

- Denny-Brown, Noelle, Gina Livermore, Marisa Shenk, and Eric Morris. "The SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers Demonstration in Utah: Interim Evaluation Report." Report submitted to SourceAmerica. Washington, DC: Mathematica, March 2018.
- Riley, Gerald F., and Kalman Rupp. "Cumulative Expenditures under the DI, SSI, Medicare, and Medicaid Programs for a Cohort of Disabled Working-Age Adults." Health Services Research, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 524.



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