



Metro Regional Quality Council: Employment Report Executive Summary

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9/2020

"To improve the quality of services and supports for people with disabilities"

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Introduction

The Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC) is a group of self-advocates/people with disabilities, their families, county workers, the Department of Human Services, community members, and service providers. We serve people that receive supports and services in Hennepin, Scott, and Dakota counties.

The purpose of the MRQC is to connect with and promote all communities of people with disabilities so that services and supports help them to live a life based on their hopes and dreams. The three primary ways the council accomplishes these goals are through:

- The implementation of a quality improvement system based on person-centered principals.
- Promoting best practices and addressing gaps in services through quality improvement work.
- Making recommendations for statewide changes to improve the quality of services and supports.

This summary will outline the current status of employment for people with disabilities and will cover best practices, and challenges/barriers collected by the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC). It will end with recommendations to improve employment experiences for people with disabilities and next steps for the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC).

The full report can be found on the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC) website <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/metro-quality-improvement-work/>

Current Employment Status for Minnesotans with Disabilities

Minnesota is an Employment First state that is committed to insuring competitive, integrated employment for all people with disabilities, with employment prioritized ahead of other supports and services. To help people with disabilities explore, find and keep a job in the community, Minnesota added three new employment services to Home and Community-Based Service waivers in 2018. The new services include; exploration, development and support services to help people with disabilities make informed decisions about working in the community.¹

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), in 2018, the annual unemployment rate for Minnesotans living with a disability was 9 percent, more than double that of the general population, which was 3.4 percent². Unemployment leads to higher poverty levels for people with disabilities than those without disabilities. The ability to find employment and have economic stability is an important quality of life indicator for Minnesotans with disabilities. The

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critical takeaway is that people living with disabilities continue to face significant obstacles to competitive, integrated employment.³

Person-Centered Quality Review – Employment Section

Person-Centered Quality Review Background Information

The Metro Regional Quality Council conducted 240 Person-Centered Quality Reviews between November 2017 and January 2020. Quality Reviews are interviews with people about their quality of life. The reviews asked about choice and control in different topic areas such as housing, daily routine, community involvement, employment, relationships, support staff, safety, transportation, case management, future life planning, services and supports, and hopes, dreams and goals.

Person-Centered Quality Review Results

This section will focus on the data gathered from the employment section of the Person-Centered Quality Reviews, looking for best practices and barriers/challenges.

Table 1: Best Practices and Barriers to Working for People with Disabilities	
Best Practices	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive supervisors • Getting along with coworkers • Flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical disabilities or health challenges • Mental illness or challenges • Confusion or fear of losing benefits • Lack of accessible transportation • Staffing • Hiring process • Supervisors
Table 1.2: Best Practices and Barriers to wWorking with Job Coaches	
Best Practices	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being engaged on the job • Help develop skills • Assist with application process • Advocate for people receiving services • Helping find a job that meets wants and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication skills • Unresponsive • Unfocused • Unreliable • Job coach turnover

Table 1: lists common best practices and barriers during job search, hiring process and practices

Table 1.2: lists common best practices and barriers to working with job coaches

Table 2: Barriers working with Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and Workforce Center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything is done online • Lack of transportation • Need/lack of support staff to help navigate process • Long process with little success • Hard to find jobs • Staff do not know how to work with people with specific disabilities

Table 2 lists common barriers working with Vocational Rehabilitation (VRS) and Workforce Center

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Employment Focus Groups and Employer Informational Interviews

The Metro Regional Quality Council gathered more specific employment information through focus groups and informational interviews.

Focus Groups Background Information

Between August 2019 and February 2020, the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC) engaged with 60 people through seven focus groups with:

- People with disabilities
- Family members
- Employment professionals
- Case manager

Employer Informational Interview Background Information

The MRQC staff conducted 16 interviews with employers across Hennepin, Scott, and Dakota Counties between January 2020 and March 2020. Interviews ended due to COVID-19. Employers ranged from small, family-owned businesses, to local franchises, to regional chain stores.

The list of employer and focus group questions/scripts asked in the interviews and focus groups can be made available upon request.

Focus Group and Informational Interview Results

This section of the summary will focus on the data gathered from the employment focus groups and employer interviews, looking for best practices and barriers/challenges.

Table 4: Best Practices in Job Search and Hiring Process	
• Volunteering can build skills	• Invite applicant to check the job out ahead of time
• Attending career and job fairs	• Have a flexible application process
• Follow-up after interview	• Relax the interview process
• Job search classes	• Get to know the applicant
• Networking	• Include their future supervisor on interview
• Employers - be prepared to communicate in different ways	

Table 4 lists common best practices during job search, hiring process and practices

Table 5: Person-Centered Best Practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate often and clearly • Get to know employee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How they learn ○ Career goals and aspirations ○ If they prefer flexibility vs consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on employee strengths • Offer opportunities to try different positions • Allow flexible hours/schedules • Provide mentor or buddy programs • Assist with transportation

Table 5 lists common person-centered best practices

Table 6: Best Practices with Workplace Environment and Job Coaches	
Workplace	Job Coaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero-tolerance policy on discrimination • Inclusion and diversity training • Tailor job descriptions to strengths • Team communication • Foster positive work environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient, flexible, open-minded • Communicate frequently with all parties • Same orientation and training • Get to know employer and employee

Table 6 lists common best practices in workplace and with job coaches from employer interviews

Table 7: Barriers/Challenges for Employees and Employers	
Employees	Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccessible/complicated applications • Disclosing disability • Lack of experience • Job requirements • Consistent attendance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health ○ Staffing ○ Transportation • Customer behavior • Job coach turnover • Lack of variability in duties • Employer assumptions • Balancing income and benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce shortage • Payment with benefits • Financial risk • Limited job description • Communication barriers • Scheduling challenges • Inconsistent employee attendance • Emotions and attitudes • Customer behavior • Poor quality job coaches • Management vs micromanagement • Safety

Table 7 lists common challenges and barriers for employees and employers in employment

Recommendations:

To improve the quality of employment experiences for people with disabilities, there needs to be immediate and sustained societal, systems, community, organizational, and individual change. The MRQC makes the following recommendations:

- Eliminate the Fair Labor Standards Act, Section 14©
- Do Away with Income and Asset Limits
- Person-Centeredness at All Stages
- Fund Education and Development
- Shift Focus to Careers
- Challenge Traditional Employment
- Simplify the System
- Customized Employment for All
- Foster a Positive Workplace Environment
- Universal Design as the Standard

A more detailed description of these recommendations can be found in the full MRQC Employment Report.

Next Steps

It is clear there are many efforts and services currently in place to help support people with disabilities develop skills, prepare for employment, find potential positions, and maintain/be successful on the job. As noted throughout this summary, there is undoubtedly room for improvement in employment services and supports in the areas of equity, informed decision-making, customized services, and targeted follow through.

While gathering information for the employment report, the Metro Regional Quality Council recognized that ableism is rampant in our society and, as a result, skews the perception of people with disabilities within the workforce. Too often, people in our society see others with disabilities as incapable or unworthy of working or pursuing a career.

The MRQC is working to change the narrative around employing people with disabilities away from one of deficit and pity to one that emphasizes power and capability. The council has started this work by providing information, resources, and tools to support employers and the general public better understand the benefits and skills people with disabilities bring to their position, place of employment, and broader communities.

Another way the MRQC is challenging this narrative is through the We Work! Employment Campaign. This campaign will be a series of short videos from different stakeholder groups such as self-advocates/people with disabilities, family members of people with disabilities, employers, providers, and council members. The videos will be a progression through employment experiences, emphasizing capability and power while also bringing to light current



exploitative, yet legal, practices. The purpose of the We Work! Campaign is to educate the public and employers on the benefits and best practices of employing people with disabilities.

Videos will be posted on the Metro Regional Quality Council website and social media and we will partner with The Arc Minnesota to share the videos through their social media and communication networks.

The Metro Regional Quality Council envisions a future where people with disabilities are seen for their strengths and contributions to their workplace. A future where people with disabilities are not kept in poverty and their careers are not limited by ablest leadership. A future where there is truly equity and justice for all people with disabilities.

References

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