

# APSE's Position Statement on Segregated Services: A Background Paper for Advocates

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The Association of Persons in Supported Employment has issued a position statement on segregated services for people with disabilities. The statement calls for several actions, including a national review of outcomes produced by sheltered workshops and a freeze on the funding of segregated services. APSE believes:

*No person should be denied the opportunity to have a real job in his or her community based on their disability or perceived support needs.*

*The unacceptably high unemployment rate of people with disabilities must be addressed through community-based, integrated employment options. People need jobs and supports for jobs, not segregation.*

*"Successful vocational rehabilitation outcomes" must include only integrated, community-based employment, and appropriate experiences, supports, and opportunities must be available to support this outcome. Placement in segregated settings should never be considered a successful outcome.*

The following is a clarification of these key points and others of the position statement.

While clearly outside of current practice in most states, these statements are entirely consistent with the Findings, Purpose, and Policy of the Rehabilitation Act. They are not a controversial new way of thinking. Rather they recognize the eloquence and clarity of Federal policy that has been around for several years, offering a path to its full implementation. The Rehabilitation Act presumes inclusive employment and clearly states integrated, competitive employment, independence, and inclusion as its goals. Likewise the major focus of the Americans with Disabilities Act is on independence and inclusion, as is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and other Federal statutes.

Further, our country has a broad and rich heritage around building and expanding the fundamental rights offered to the citizens of this country. There is an abundance of civil rights legislation that upholds the individual's right to be part of our society. There are few groups remaining that are segregated from the rest of society. We know that given the proper combination of services and supports people can work and assume valued roles in their communities. The segregation of people with disabilities cannot be allowed to continue.

APSE views this as a civil rights issue and believes it is time to fully honor the Federal mandate for inclusion.

***Youth with disabilities transitioning to adult employment should move directly into integrated jobs, and should never be sent to workshops or segregated facilities to "get ready" for employment. Integrated employment and necessary supports must be available to all students at the time of school exit, regardless of intensity of support needs.***

Transition to adult life for people with disabilities should not include prolonged readiness training for job placement nor long-term placement in facilities. This is not the spirit or intent of IDEA legislation, and research has shown it to be unnecessary and wasteful. Students with disabilities, even those with severe disabilities can benefit from supported employment services prior to and after their graduation.

***It is time for a national review of facility-based, sheltered day services that documents the outcomes and costs for people with severe disabilities, including median wages, benefits, skills gained, level of integration, and other quality of life indicators. Comparative measures should be presented to consumers to assist their choice of employment services.***

Proponents of segregated services often offer "choice" as the reason these models should be maintained. Yet these models offer no recent comprehensive national or state-by-state data, denying individuals access to data on which they can base choice relative to segregated employment. For example, how can an individual make an informed choice without information on expected wages, hours, type of work, and benefits? And, what do other participants in these models report on satisfaction, advancement, or other key areas?

On the other hand, over a decade, research confirms that the majority of individuals with severe disabilities who need employment services fare better in supported employment than in sheltered work or other types of day services. For example, Kiernan, McGaughey, & Schalock (1986), examined segregated and integrated services and outcomes for more than 85,000 individuals served by 1,119 agencies. Quarterly earnings of sheltered workshop clients were \$402.75, compared to \$786.01 for individuals in supported employment, with supported employment hourly wages almost double that of sheltered work.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration, US Dept. of Education data of vocational rehabilitation Status 26 Closures for FY 1995 and 1997 also shows that supported employees earn far more wages than those in sheltered employment, with hourly earnings at closure: in sheltered services just \$2.42, while supported employees earn \$5.47. Supported employees earn more weekly as well (\$130.40) than sheltered employees (\$61.20).

Based on the experiences of organizations that have totally converted to community-based services, almost all of the individuals formerly served in segregated facilities chose integrated employment. For the relatively small number of people who did not want to work in the community at the time, individualized plans were developed for how they wished to spend their day and with whom.

***Integrated, community-based placements should be the criteria for successful vocational rehabilitation closures, rather than placements in segregated settings.***

RSA data for FY 1997 indicate that 8,022 individuals were still closed as "rehabilitated" in sheltered work that year, despite the clear stated intent of the Act. Such placements in segregated settings should not be considered a successful vocational outcome. Case closures in a segregated, congregate facility are not in alignment with the spirit of the Rehabilitation Act

amendments and help perpetuate unnecessary segregation. "Successful vocational rehabilitation outcomes" should only be integrated, community-based employment. Appropriate experiences, supports, and opportunities must be available to support this outcome.

*A freeze on funding for segregated services, and concurrent allocation and continuing expansion of new funding to support integrated, community-based employment options is needed.*

From 1986 to 1991, the average number of persons in segregated options increased by over 28%. APSE opposes this continuing growth in funding that supports the expansion of segregation. Again, this position is in alignment with national legislation, including the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments. It also affirms that people with severe disabilities cannot have a true choice to escape segregation and unemployment until a real commitment is made for planful changes in the way funds are allocated within the vocational service system. It is clear that this will only occur by ending the growth of segregated, facility-based services to their current capacity and expanding community services.

By calling for a freeze, APSE is not seeking to cause staff or consumers of service in segregated facilities harm in any way. Cost of living adjustments for salaries of existing staff, repair of unsafe conditions, or other needed expenditures to maintain current quality or improve inadequacies must of course occur. But there should be no further expansion of people served through increased funding of segregated models.

This is a reasonable approach to solving a civil rights problem that must be faced. It is essential if supported employment capacity is to grow in relation to the large numbers of unemployed people who can benefit from it. Only 18% of 643 agencies sampled in one study reported that they have reduced or discontinued their facility-based programs, with the majority either expanding or keeping the same the number of consumers in segregated settings.

The Presidential Task Force on Employment of People with Disabilities has been charged with improving the 75% unemployment rate of adults with disabilities to equal that of the general population. The APSE position statement recognizes that this must include a call to place funding development in community services, where it needs to be to begin to solve this continued national disgrace of unemployment of people with disabilities.

*There must be a cessation of funding for new segregated facilities.*

A freeze on funding and the building of new facilities with public funds is necessary for integrated services to be developed in order to meet the needs of unemployed people with disabilities. Constructing new buildings to house people during their daytime hours is not a good answer for the unemployment of any minority group, and effectively creates disincentives for integration as facilities must keep people in them to justify their costs and upkeep. There must be a national commitment to end the development of more or larger segregated facilities.

*A significant increase in each community's capacity for integrated work opportunities for people with disabilities, including the development of "free standing" employment providers that support integrated employment services is needed.*

Limiting the growth of segregated services is not an answer by itself to continuing discrimination and unemployment of people with disabilities. There must be clear commitments from state leadership to build capacity for supported employment services,

including offering real incentives for facility conversion, supporting people in integrated settings, and developing new providers that are “free standing” from existing sheltered work facilities.

*The promotion of greater informed choice regarding integrated employment opportunities, career development, and options for support that include community employment experiences matched to interests and skills is critical.*

It seems that people on all sides of the issue of what to do about segregated services agree that people need to have choice about where they work. For a choice to be meaningful and informed, people must have a variety of employment experiences matched to their interests and skills. It is not enough to ask a person who has spent many years in a workshop “do you want to leave?” Nor is it enough to show someone a tape of a workplace, or have him or her spend a week in a fast food restaurant or on a cleaning crew, regardless of vocational interest.

The goals stated by APSE are all reasonable and attainable, and take into account what we know about services today and what we know about what people with severe disabilities are capable of achieving. This position does not call for immediate and massive shutdown of workshops. It does however, set forth a clear vision requiring planful change and rapid movement toward the goals of the Rehabilitation Act and calls for the change necessary to make practice consistent with the Act. These goals lay the groundwork for real and needed change. Clearly, there is much work to be done to support such a massive effort to support people in accessing their rights to integration. APSE stands ready to work in partnership with states, organizations, and individuals to further the goal of full employment of people with disabilities.

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