

CHOOSE WORK

APSE THE ASSOCIATION FOR PERSONS IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

“We have reached a crisis in unemployment and underemployment of people with high support needs who are considered to have the most severe disabilities. Supported employment while not yet fully realizing its potential, offers by far the best opportunities for employment and a career for individuals most at risk of living without a job. Yet studies show the reality for most of these individuals is lifelong segregation, in day treatment, habilitation, or sheltered training.”

— *Toward Integrated Employment for All: APSE's Position Statement
on Segregated Services for People with Disabilities*. 1999

The problem is the segregated settings, not the people in them. We must build capacity and shift funding to support adults with disabilities to work and live as part of our nation's communities, enjoying the same rights and opportunities afforded to all citizens of this country.

“Congress finds that ... (3) Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to — (A) live independently; (B) enjoy self-determination; (C) make choices; (D) contribute to society; (E) pursue meaningful careers; and (F) enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society.”

— Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in 1992

If our national policy states that disability in no way diminishes the right to pursue meaningful careers, why is it that most people with disabilities continue to be segregated and excluded from the community workforce?



While the federal policies of the United States eloquently and clearly state integrated, competitive employment, independence, and inclusion as its goals, the reality is that most people, particularly those with higher support needs, continue to be excluded from the workforce of our communities. For every one person working in integrated settings through supported employment, approximately 4 to 5 people remain in segregated programs (Braddock, Hemp, Parish, and Westrich, 1998). We know that, given the proper combination of services and supports, people can work and assume valued roles in their communities. Quality of life for people in supported employment is better than that of people in segregated settings (Gilmore and Butterworth, 1996; Wehman, Revell, and Kregel, 1998). Despite the growing body of evidence supporting integrated employment for people with disabilities, more people continue to enter segregated settings. APSE believes it is time to shift this trend and expand the opportunities for people with disabilities to be included in the workforce and build capacity to make this vision a reality.





The average wage in
sheltered settings is below
minimum wage — \$2.46
per hour. Average weekly
earnings are \$64.



Workshops and day activity centers are limited in their access to different types of work.

Average earnings of people in
integrated employment are
consistently 250% to 300%
higher than those in
segregated workshops.

(Butterworth, Gilmore, and Kiernan, 2000)





Approximately 80% of state funding
and 90% of federal funding
support segregated services,
(Institute for Community Inclusion, 1999)




There are many thousands of
occupations that people with
disabilities can pursue in their
communities, based on their
interests and skills.





The segregation of people with disabilities is not declining. In fact, recently there has been an increase in the number of people entering segregated settings.

From 1996 – 1999, 63,134 people entered segregated settings,

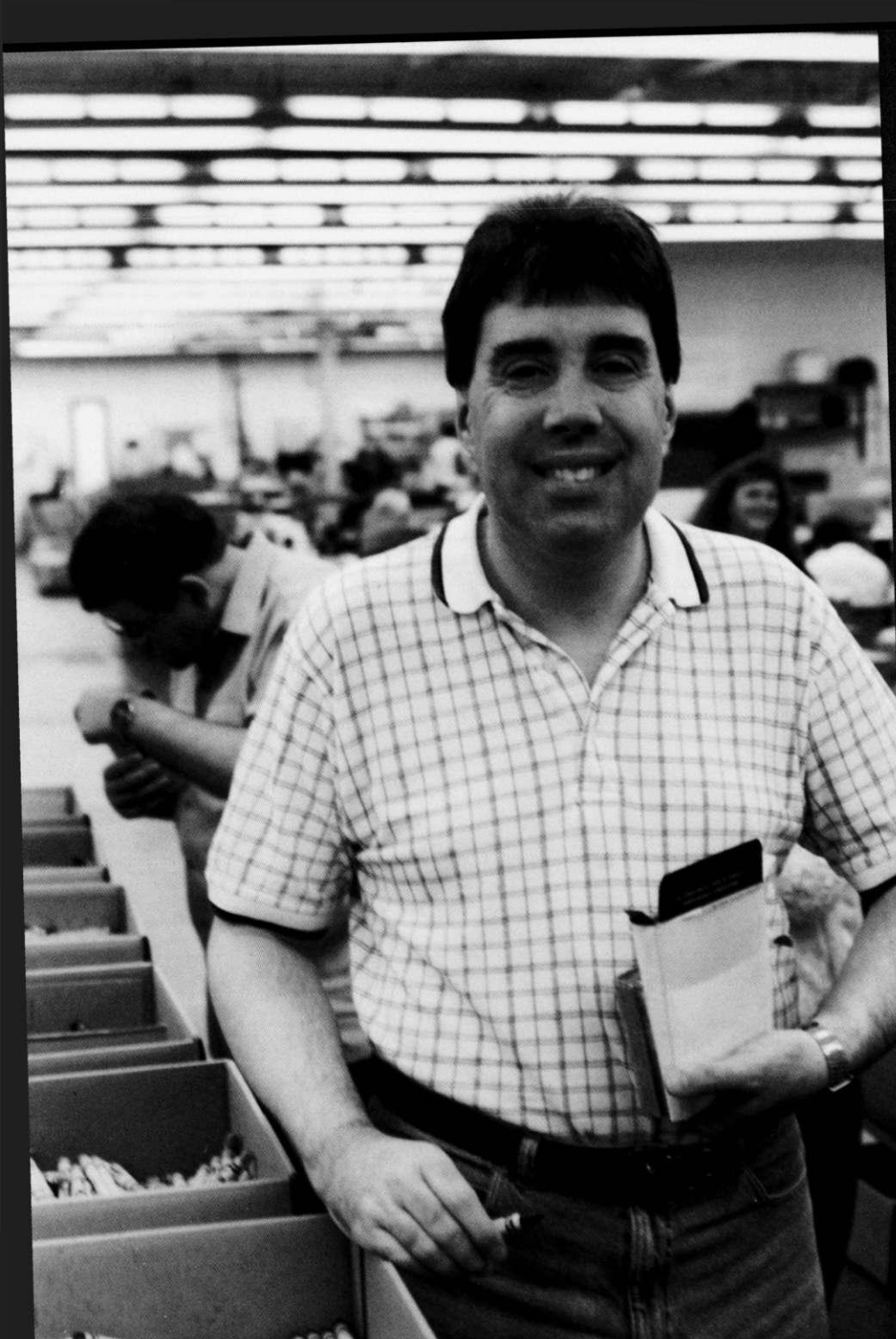


leaving limited funds to
support people to work
in their community's
workforce.



**while only 21,568 people joined
the integrated workforce (MR/DD funds).**

(Gilmore and Butterworth, 2001).



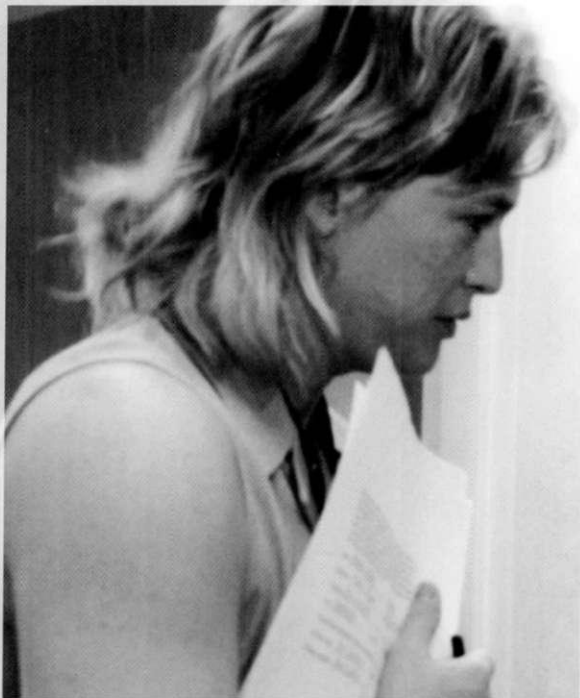
Many people still believe that people with disabilities need a sheltered setting, or a "special place" because they are not ready for competitive employment.

People with disabilities have demonstrated their ability to learn and perform when they have been provided a good job match and appropriate training. The same can be true for people with disabilities in the community can be designed to meet their needs.



Prejudice,
negative attitudes,
and stereotyping
can never be
overcome with
segregation.





In order for community members
to get to know people with disabilities
as people first, they must have ongoing
opportunities to interact.





While there are no recent studies, earlier research shows that sheltered facilities have limited success with real job placement, at rates of less than 3% annually, and close to zero for people with more severe disabilities.

(California Department of Finance, 1992; Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1992)

Supported employment
works because people
learn their jobs
on-the-job, with
the supports they
need to succeed.



There are at least 500,000 people, and probably closer to 1,000,000 adults in segregated settings (both work and non-work settings) in the United States alone who could benefit by moving into the community and joining the workforce. (Wehman and Bricout, 2000)

Despite alternatives to segregation of people with disabilities, there has never been a year where the number of people entering integrated employment outpaced the number of people entering segregated settings.

Although still not the dominant practice in many states, supporting employment in the community workforce is the direction of federal policy. However, as long as funding, policies, and the service system remain solidly entrenched in old approaches, people will remain segregated, forever denied the opportunity to work in the community and explore their full potential. The freedom to Choose Work lies in assuming all people have the capacity to join the workforce; redirecting resources from segregated to integrated supports; creating incentives and flexibility in funding; and investing in technical assistance to build capacity for ongoing change.

Our country has a broad and rich heritage of 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 still largely 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. We know that people's quality of life improves with community employment. It is time to fully honor the federal mandate for inclusion.

We invite you to join us in building capacity



CHOOSE WORK

to make this vision a reality.



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