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JB Pritzker, Governor

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Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary Designate

100 South Grand Avenue, East • Springfield, Illinois 62762  
401 South Clinton Street • Chicago, Illinois 60607

DATE: May 7, 2024

## **MEMORANDUM**

TO: The Honorable John F. Curran, Senate Minority Leader  
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President  
The Honorable Tony M. McCombie, House Minority Leader  
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House

FROM: Dulce Quintero   
Secretary Designate   
Illinois Department of Human Services

SUBJECT: **Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act Annual Report**

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The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act Annual Report on behalf of the Illinois Department of Human Services-Division of Rehabilitation Services to fulfill the requirements set forth in Public Act 101-0368.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Robyn L. Lewis, PhD., DRS Policy Advisor at [robyn.lewis@illinois.gov](mailto:robyn.lewis@illinois.gov), 217-606-9070.

cc: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor  
John W. Hollman, Clerk of the House  
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Illinois Senate  
Legislative Research Unit  
State Government Report Center



## Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act

Illinois Department of Human Services

Division of Rehabilitation Services



# 2023 Annual Report

## **Cover Story: Competitive Integrated Employment Success!**

**Susan was referred to Human Support Services (HSS) in Waterloo for Customized Employment Services. After sustaining an embolic stroke on 04/28/2020, she subsequently incurred significant cognitive deficits in learning/acquisition, verbal working memory, verbal fluency, visual reasoning, visual construction, adaptive problem solving, processing speed, delayed memory, limited encoded information, and visual working memory. Before the stroke Susan had worked for over 20 years as an orthodontic dental assistant.**

**Susan was eager to return to the competitive workforce, however, she expressed concerns about what kind of work she could do, and who would hire her with these new functional limitations. Once Susan completed the Discovery Stage of Customized Employment with HSS staff, she was then able to identify potential jobs based on her skills, knowledge, interest, and abilities. Susan along with HSS Employment Specialist Beth toured several employers in the community with the intent of customizing a position specifically for Susan. Susan's top interests included working with animals at a veterinary clinic or working with older adults at a senior living center.**

**After 3 months of diligently seeking the perfect job fit for Susan, she was hired at Bria/Integrity Healthcare (senior living center) as a dining room attendant. Her duties include but are not limited to, folding silverware, cleaning off tables, and sweeping. Susan loves talking with the residents at Bria/Integrity while getting her job completed. To date, Susan is doing well and has been labeled as one of the fastest silverware rollers in the Metro East!**

# **Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act (820 ILCS 97)**

## **Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services**

### **Annual Report**

January 1, 2023- December 31, 2023

#### **Background**

Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act was enacted effective January 1, 2020. The Act requires the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), through its Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and in collaboration with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), shall establish a 5-year Customized Employment (CE) Pilot Program that serves a minimum of 25 individuals by the second year of the Pilot Program.

The Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act, (820 ILCS 97) is to assist individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities or a similar condition with a most significant disability who seek employment and require more individualized assistance to achieve and maintain integrated employment at competitive wages through a process of customized planning and negotiation.

During the first six months of the Pilot Program, IDHS-DRS met with members of the community, disability organizations, advocacy groups, the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD), and IDHS-DDD to develop a CE Pilot Program. A workgroup was established and called the Customized Employment Workgroup (CEW). The CEW met frequently and developed a contract for Customized Employment. The contract includes an intensive discovery phase, a customized person-centered planning process phase, and a job development and placement phase. The second portion of the contract focuses on support while on the job. There are six-phases of employment support that allow for individualization based on the customer's needs. The CEW and DHS-DRS agreed, and the first CE contract took effect July 1, 2020, with six organizations from four of the then five DRS regions.

Since this is a statewide program, assistance is provided through a variety of methods to individuals with Most Significant disabilities in maintaining competitive, integrated community employment. Competitive employment is considered, integrated employment within the community which pays the Customer (employee) at least minimum wage or a wage commensurate to the prevailing wage for those individuals without a disability, applicable fringe benefits, and the opportunity for advancement.

Individuals are eligible for Customized Employment Program once they have been determined [Most Significant](#) and have a demonstrated need for this service. The determination is made by the Rehabilitation Counselor by answering a set of questions about the customer's work history and an [assessment of functional limitations](#).

Customized employment contract provisions are outlined in the [IDHS-DRS Community Rehabilitation Program Manual](#). During service provision, staffings between the customer, DRS, and Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) are expected to occur every 8 weeks and continue during the length of the case, up to 24 months.

Any Community Rehabilitation Provider doing business with DHS-DRS must meet the requirements set forth in [89 ILCS 530](#): Criteria for the Evaluation of Programs of services in Community Rehabilitation Agencies. CRP vendors are also required to have at least one staff member certified in Customized Employment through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE).

In October of 2022, IDHS-DRS received a federal grant of almost \$14 million to engage in a five-year pilot project to redirect students, youth, and adults with disabilities towards competitive integrated employment, and away from subminimum wage employment. The Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (or SWTCIE) demonstration project views customized employment as a foundational component to achieve project goals. Through SWTCIE activities, the goal is to divert at least 280 participants from subminimum wage activities to competitive integrated employment. As of February 2024, 34 individuals with significant disabilities are participating in the SWTCIE project.

## Results

### **First Year Participation of Customers (Calendar Year (CY) 2020):**

- **Six (6)** CE Contracts (4/5 regions represented)
- Total Allocation for Six Contracts **\$451,350.00**
- Total Customers Served: **13**
- Total Customers Achieving Competitive Integrated Employment: **2**

### **Second Year Participation of Customers (CY 2021):**

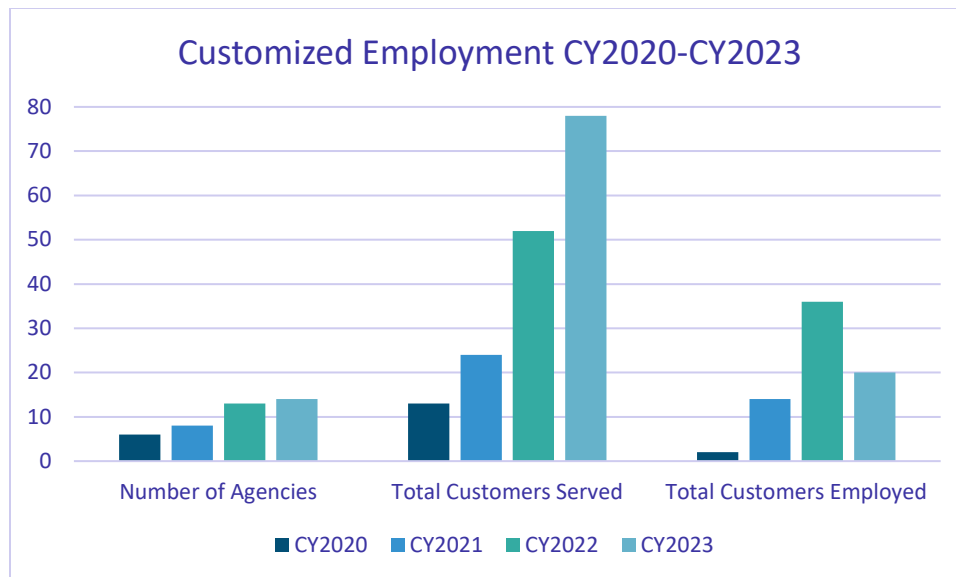
- **Eight (8)** CE Contracts (4/5 regions represented)
- Total Allocation for Eight Contracts for CY2021: **\$655,200**
- Total Customers Served: **24**
- Total Customers Achieving Competitive Integrated Employment: **14**

### **Third Year Participation of Customers (CY 2022):**

- **Thirteen (13)** CE Contracts (5/6 regions represented)
- Total Allocation for Thirteen Contracts: **\$735,300**
- Total Customers Served: **52**
- Total Customers Achieving Competitive Integrated Employment: **36**

### **Fourth Year Participation of Customers (CY 2023):**

- **Fourteen (14)** CE Contracts with three more pending for SFY2025 (5/6 regions represented)
- Total Allocation for Fourteen Contracts: **\$832,200**
- Total Customers Served: **78**
- Total Customers Achieving Competitive Integrated Employment: **20** (Many participants are likely in the middle of the CE experience—anticipate seeing a larger number next reporting period)



## Recommendations

### Statewide Program

Illinois should thoughtfully consider the following when determining broader expansion of the Customized Employment:

- Capacity to provide continued and ongoing customized employment training to program providers.
- Capacity to continue, improve, or expand the efforts of the Customized Employment Workgroup.
- Capacity to engage schools, community rehabilitation programs, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and supervisors, and other support services such as benefits planning.

### Pilot Program Improvements

The following improvements could improve the current pilot session:

- Incorporate benefits planning for customers and their families.
- Expand Customized Employment education and training efforts.
- Improve relationships, training and education efforts, and gain feedback from employers engaged with customized employment.

## Conclusion

The CE Pilot has been in effect since 1/1/20. The process has led to the implementation of a CE contract that took effect 7/1/20 to serve at least 25 new CE individuals over the course of the five-year pilot period. The results through 12/31/23 show a total of **167 individuals served** with **72** of those individuals **obtaining competitive integrated employment**, well in excess of initial goals. Budgeted cost per customer engaged in competitive employment services is \$13,450 for completion of all nine phases. DRS is committed to completing the five-year pilot program, with the intent of evaluating efficacy at the end of the pilot to determine statewide, long-term implementation. Over the course of the first four years of this pilot, a few challenges have been faced. The first year of the CE Pilot took effect in a pandemic environment but still demonstrated that the pilot should continue, and has continued, with significant success. Additionally, some CE contract holders have reported seeing a limited number of referrals. DRS continues to work with local DRS field offices to ensure familiarity with the pilot and to encourage increases in referrals for customized employment. Finally, the provision of customized employment can take up to 24 months. Discovery with the customer, job development, and then 45 weeks of support on the job, are integral to customer success and the success of the program, yet do not lead to rapid outcomes.

DRS is committed to supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in obtaining competitive integrated employment through increased access to Customized Employment services statewide. DRS will continue to track data on impact and outcomes so that trends, successes, and course corrections can be evaluated and implemented to strengthen Customized Employment services within DRS.