

PROMISING PRACTICES



Editor's note: The following article highlights the success of one governmental agency in improving services while managing costs. The Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services has earned CARF accreditation for many years. In its most recent CARF survey report, the agency received an exemplary service practice recognition and commendation for its data collection system. Although this state agency chose to provide employment services in house, many private organizations also capably offer employment services for persons with disabilities. Many of these accredited service providers are contracted with governmental bodies because of the providers' proven success in providing employment services. Please read their inspiring stories under the Employment Services heading of the ECS Promising Practices newsletter at www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices.

State agency discovers many benefits to in-house employment services

For several years, the [Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services](http://www.tn.gov/divisions/rehabilitation-services) (TN DRS) contracted with community rehabilitation providers for job placement services for job seekers with disabilities. Originally, outsourcing this service was believed to be a cost-savings measure. However, after TN DRS spent millions of dollars on contracted services with unsatisfactory results, agency staff members agreed to bring employment services back in house.

In 2005, TN DRS formed a committee to determine how best to return employment services to the agency. Representatives from the East Tennessee Rehabilitation Network (ETRN), who served on the committee, volunteered to initiate a pilot project to determine if they could effect change to clients by providing employment services in their catchment area.

With that move, the Project Employment by Team Effort -- or PETE

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Putting out the good word: Information about the Promising Practices series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization's community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an exemplary

for short -- was born.

The first step in the project was to form a regional employment team comprising ETRN staff members and others. Until then, employment efforts rarely involved sharing resources across county lines. PETE members agreed early on that a goal of the project was to share job leads, candidates, and other resources in a multi-county region for the purpose of expanding opportunities and areas of influence.

To share information across county lines, employment team members developed a database that PETE members could access on the state's network. Essential components in building the PETE database included:

- A job-ready candidate pool.
- Information about area employers.
- A query to match candidates with employers.

Using the database, ETRN employment counselors could search for job-ready candidates by areas of vocational interest. When job candidates spoke to their employment counselor about a particular company, the counselor could access information specific to that employer and determine if an ETRN staff member had an existing relationship with the employer to enable a single point of contact.

Another initiative of PETE included mobile services to isolated areas not previously served. Employment team members traveled to rural locations and conducted mobile job-readiness assessments and training with clients there.

An Eat Lunch with an Employer Series (Eat LES) was developed to educate referring vocational rehabilitation counselors about the dual customer model -- clients and employers. Each month, agency staff members were invited to hear the perspective of an employer in a different industry, including healthcare, manufacturing, and retail. Over a brown-bag lunch, an employer presented its hiring needs, hiring preferences, and the qualifications it seeks in job candidates. Business needs, based on the needs for employers, would have to be met if the agency was to be successful in assisting persons with disabilities in going to work.

As the PETE project progressed, a need became evident to identify standard operating procedures, including a description of each stakeholder's role in the employment process -- job seeker, referring counselor, employment counselor, and employer. An operating procedure protocol was developed with input from all parties affected by the project. Training was then conducted with agency staff.

Within a year, the pilot project was producing results not matched in other parts of the state. Indeed, regions of the state that were involved in PETE have led the state in successful employment outcomes for four

rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series. We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

Promising Practices issues now archived online!

Do you remember a past article that you'd like to forward on to a colleague? Did you just join Promising Practices and want to see issues we covered in the past? Now you can! Find the current and archived issues online at www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices and follow links to past issues. Past issues are categorized by topic so you can easily find articles of interest.

out of the past five years.

The byproducts of the PETE program have been positive. For example:

- The Rehabilitation Services Administration established a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling as a professional standard for vocational rehabilitation counselors in state agencies. In the PETE catchment area, 74 percent of professional staff members meet the national standard, compared to 45 percent in TN DRS overall.
- When TN DRS received a grant to provide Spanish in the workplace, all members of the PETE employment team volunteered to complete a semester of Spanish language classes to help expand services to the state's underserved Latino population.

The best way to help individuals with disabilities achieve employment is to remove all barriers within the agency by pooling resources, knowledge, and talent. The strength of PETE has been the teamwork that the project fostered.

PETE continues to grow and has proved itself as a national model of promising practices.

For more information, contact Michele Keffer, manager, Tennessee Rehabilitation Center, Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services, at (423) 639-5148 or Michele.Keffer@tn.gov. The agency's website is at www.tn.gov/humanserv/rehab/rehab_main.html.