

# Closing Sheltered Workshops in Vermont

Vermont's pioneering efforts to close its last sheltered workshop for individuals with developmental disabilities by 2003 involved effective interagency, university, provider, and stakeholder collaboration. Also key to this movement were state regulations that gradually restricted and then prohibited the use of state funds for sheltered workshops and enclaves.

Central to the vision for closing sheltered workshops – which had been operating in the state for 35 years – and converting them into individualized supports is the belief that anyone can work if they are given the right supports.

With the conversion of sheltered workshops into individualized supports, services were tailored for individuals and most received one-on-one day supports for employment and/or other day activities such as volunteer work, recreation, keeping appointments, running errands, and visiting family and friends.

**Strategies Used.** Vermont fulfilled its goal of closing sheltered workshops through three main strategies:

1. Keep a clear goal in mind. By focusing on the goal of providing individualized day supports to everyone receiving services, the state's Division of Disability and Aging Services (DDAS) worked with local providers to implement a viable process to fulfill its objective of closing the sheltered workshops.
2. Approach the elimination of sheltered workshops in stages. Vermont first stopped new placements to workshops, then moved on to converting existing workshops to community-based options. Working with providers in the conversion process before putting into place a policy directive that funding could no longer be used for sheltered workshops was an important part of this strategy. In this way, the state avoided the disruption of "pulling out the rug" from under providers" by eliminating congregate funding all at once.
3. Maintain Open Communication. By involving stakeholders and enabling open communication. Vermont's state agencies (DDAS and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation) and university worked with providers to address concerns and facilitate workshop conversion before actually eliminating workshop funding.

**State Regulations Phase Out Sheltered Workshops.** Vermont's Developmental Services System of Care Plan, required by the state's Developmental Disabilities Act of 1996, is developed every three years and is updated annually to describe the nature, extent, allocation, and timing of services to Vermonters with developmental disabilities and their families.

Vermont's 1999 System of Care Plan stated that DDAS funds could not be used to increase the capacity of sheltered workshops (or congregate residential settings). The 2002 Plan went a step further by stating that state funds could not be used to increase capacity of group employment settings such as enclaves or work crews. These initial steps served to stop the growth in sheltered workshop placements.

In 2005, once all existing sheltered workshops had been successfully closed, the System of Care Plan stated that DDAS funds could not be used at all to fund sheltered workshops.

**FMI:** To view the Vermont System of Care Plan for Developmental Services for Fiscal Years 2005-2007, click on the attached PDF. To learn more about the closing of sheltered workshops in Vermont, contact Bryan Dague, Center for Disability and Community Inclusion, at [bryan.dague@uvm.edu](mailto:bryan.dague@uvm.edu) or 802-656-1345; Jennie Masterson, Vermont Division of Disability and Aging Services, at [jennie.masterson@dail.state.vt.us](mailto:jennie.masterson@dail.state.vt.us) or 802-786-2571; or Jennifer Sullivan Sulewski, Research Associate, Institute for Community Inclusion, at [jennifer.sulewski@umb.edu](mailto:jennifer.sulewski@umb.edu) or 617-287-4356.