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Vermont Receives International Zero Project Award at United Nations Conference in Vienna

Award Recognizes Program Innovation in Supported Employment Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

WATERBURY, VT – On February 23, 2017, the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) and its partner agencies were recognized by the Zero Project at its 2017 conference held at the United Nations in Vienna, Austria. Vermont received the “Innovative Policy 2017 on Employment, Work, and Vocational Education” award for its Supported Employment Program for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities. This award recognizes countries, governments, and organizations that incorporate innovative practices into their human services through sustained policies.

The Vermont Chapter of Association of People Supporting Employment First (VTAPSE) and the University of Vermont financed the travel cost for a delegation consisting of Bryan Dague, Research Associate at University of Vermont; Elizabeth Sightler, Executive Director at Champlain Community Services; and Lisa Culbertson, Employment Director at Upper Valley Services, to attend the conference and receive the award on behalf of DAIL and their supported employment colleagues. The delegation presented “Vermont Supported Employment Program of 1983 Innovation” to more than 500 participants from 70 different countries.

The positive impact to individuals, the scalability of its model, and the ability to sustain and enhance employment services are factors that led to the prestigious award. The path to receiving the 2017 Zero Project award began in 1983 when DAIL, partner agencies, and UVM launched a system change initiative to move people from segregated work and substandard wages into the typical workforce and jobs at prevailing rates. Job site supports for employees and employers addressing the needs of both allowed workers with significant challenges to be successful alongside their coworkers.

Today, about 1,260 Vermonters with developmental disabilities are working. Vermont’s employment rate for individuals who receive developmental disabilities services is 48 percent, as compared to the national average of 35 percent. DAIL’s employment program is known beyond Vermont for well-implemented employment practices and policies. Many states and countries come to Vermont to learn about the principles that guided the establishment of Vermont’s Supported Employment Program: employment, decent work, and meaningful vocational education and training of persons with disabilities.

About the Project Award

The Zero Project and the World Future Council are partners working for a world with zero barriers for people with disabilities. The Zero Project locates models worldwide that improve the daily lives and legal rights of persons with disabilities from which an international community of experts selects the award recipients. <https://zeroproject.org/policy/long-term-inclusion-in-the-open-labour-market-state-wide/>

About DAIL’s Supported Employment Program for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

Supported Employment Programs and services are located in the designated and specialized service agencies that partner with DAIL - Developmental Disabilities Services Division to deliver person-centered work supports. Support services are founded on the belief that most people can work, regardless of disability challenges, when provided the right supports.