



There's no sheltered workshops in Vermont

This article is from Down Syndrome Australia's Voice magazine, August 2018.

Bryan Dague wrote the original article. He works at the University of Vermont, USA.



The article is about what happened when the sheltered workshops in Vermont were closed down.



We have written this article in an easy to read way.



You can get help to read it.



Vermont is a state in the USA.

In 1980, the state decided to start closing down the **sheltered workshops**.

Sheltered workshops are separate workplaces for people with disabilities.

In Australia, they are called ADEs or supported employment.



They closed the workshops down because they believed that people with disabilities should be part of the community.

This includes being able to work in regular jobs with everyone else.



They started with one sheltered workshop. They found other jobs in the community for the people who had worked there.



This went well, so lots of other sheltered workshops all over Vermont closed down too.



The Vermont government decided not to give sheltered workshops any more money. The last one closed in 2002.



Instead, the government made very good support programs to help people with disabilities get jobs and be successful in their work.

Some people get support to have their own businesses.



The support programs believe that everyone has skills and qualities and is able to have a job.



The programs find out what people are interested in, what they are good at, and what they want to do.

This helps to find the right job.



The programs give people lots of training and support to do their job well.



As well as having regular jobs, lots of other good things are happening for people with intellectual disabilities in Vermont.



This includes being able to go to **college**. This is further education for people who have left school, like TAFE's and universities.



The US government gives money to colleges and universities to run courses for people with intellectual disabilities.

The University of Vermont runs a course called Think College Vermont.



Students at Think College do a two year course where they learn useful information, have sport and social activities, and learn life and work skills.

They also get to choose extra things they want to learn as part of their course.



They get a certificate at the end of the course.



9 out of 10 Think College students get jobs when they leave college.

This is because they have the knowledge and skills that employers look for.

Other colleges are now running the course because it works so well.

Here are some stories about some Think College students.



Stirling did Poetry and Film Studies as part of the course at Think College.

This helped her get the kind of work she wanted when she left college.

Here is Stirling talking in a video:
<https://youtu.be/Ajj7RjFWKyA>



Matthew learned about farming and food as part of his course. He also helped at an emergency food store.

Since leaving college he has two food service jobs as well as his own egg business.



Andrew has been doing **Cultural Anthropology** as part of his Think College course. This is learning about different groups of people, their traditional foods and how they live.

Andy is also a co-owner of a business that makes and sells dog treats. Andy's Dandys
<http://andysdandysvt.com>



Students at Think College get lots of support to do their courses.

This includes each student having a **peer mentor**.

Peer mentors are other students at the university. They are supporters, role models and friends.



The peer mentors say that they have learned a lot too.

They say they have really enjoyed being a mentor and it has been a very important experience in their lives.



Bryan Dague, who wrote the original article, says that closing the workshops has helped everyone.



More people with disabilities in regular jobs has led to people being included in the community in many other ways too.



He says it is important to start inclusion early.

Given the chance and support, people with intellectual disabilities can do really well.

August 2018

Page 5

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By Bryan Dague

Vermont is a small rural state in north-eastern United States with the nation's second-smallest population. The Vermont state motto, *Freedom and Unity*, aptly describes the culture as seeking balance between the personal freedom and independence of the individual citizen, with the common good of the larger community. Vermont is known for being a state in terms of progressive social politics and social responsibility. Vermont has also been a progressive leader in disability services as one of the first states to implement community-based employment services, close the state institutions, and end sheltered and segregated employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD).

The movement away from sheltered workshops began in 1980 with a supported employment demonstration project. Key leaders with the state of Vermont and University of Vermont were driven by the values and belief that people with disabilities deserve to be part of the community like everyone else, not institutionalized or segregated. The supported employment demonstration project called Project Transition moved in a sheltered workshop in Barre, Vermont. The project recruited workers from its sheltered workshop to participate in the model demonstration. Staff found community-based employment for workers with support and training from agency job coaches. Project Transition took three to four years to successfully move about 75 people out of the facility into community employment. The success of this demonstration project led to nationwide state throughout the state (Kightling, 1986).

Since the initial supported employment demonstration project, inclusive employment of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities has steadily increased. The sheltered workshops gradually closed as people found employment in the community or became involved in other community services. In 2002, Vermont closed its last sheltered workshop for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, making Vermont the first state with no sheltered work.



• Matthew working at Outlook Disabilityhouse

Vermont's supported employment programs provide a full range of services which enable people with disabilities to access and succeed in competitive employment, including self-employment. Services have been developed from a philosophy that presumes competence and employability of everyone given the proper supports are provided. Person-centered planning, creative job development, meaningful job matches, systematic instruction, assistive technology and natural supports are valued for full inclusion in the Vermont workforce.

As Vermont moved away from sheltered work, the decision was made to fund only individualized integrated community employment. The state clearly prescribed restrictions in the use of Medicaid dollars for "congregate work." We decided we would find what we believed in, not just find what we did not, commented one state leader. This made the difference. The state of Vermont recently received international recognition by the Zero Project for Innovative Policy. The Zero Project certified Vermont's

Continues on next page...

You can find links to more information about this story in the original article in Voice magazine.