



JB Pritzker, Governor


Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary

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DATE: April 1, 2025

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Dulce Quintero 
Secretary Illinois Department of
Human Services

SUBJECT: Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act on behalf of the Division of Rehabilitation in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in 820 ILCS 97/130.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Tereta Love-Rutherford, Public Service Administrator, at Tereta.Love-Rutherford@illinois.gov.

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

2024 Annual Report



Cover Story: Competitive Integrated Employment Success!

Catrina graduated from Crab Orchard High School in Marion, Illinois in 2018. In March 2024, Katrina was referred to Centerstone of Illinois for Customized Employment services. Katrina met the requirements for Customized Employment due to her disability diagnosis and her functional limitations. Through the Discovery process, her team was able to identify many strengths, abilities, capabilities, and interests such as her attention to detail, love and consideration for animals, compassion for people, ability to communicate, and her overall desire to work.

After completing the Discovery process, the Employment Specialist at Centerstone began looking for employment opportunities to develop a job with the best job fit for Katrina based on her abilities, skills, and interests. Katrina began working as a Kennel Tech for the City of Herrin, Illinois Animal Control in May 2024, earning \$14 per hour and working 16 hours per week. Her duties included changing and cleaning cat cages, feeding the cats and dogs, cleaning dog kennels, and cleaning the office. When she finished her tasks, she could interact with the animals to keep them accustomed to human interaction. Occasionally, she also picked up animals reported to Animal Control. Initially, her mother and a job coach assisted her, but by July 2024, her mother had faded from the job site, leaving her with just the job coach.

In September 2024, Katrina was informed that one of her supervisors had resigned. This opened an opportunity for advancement and Katrina was more than confident that she was the woman for the job. Her employer agreed and she was promptly offered a full-time Animal Control Officer position! Katrina is looking forward to having many years of success working in a field that she loves. Congratulations, Katrina!

[Watch Katrina's story.](#)

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

Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services

Annual Report

January 1, 2024- December 31, 2024

Background

Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act was enacted January 1, 2020, and amended in September 2024 with an effective date of January 1, 2025. 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), to establish a Customized Employment (CE) Demonstration Program in alignment with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) [“Essential Elements of Customized Employment for Universal Application”](#) and to serve a minimum of 100 individuals by July 1, 2027.

Purpose

The Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act, ([820 ILCS 97](#)) is to assist individuals with a most significant disability, intellectual and developmental disabilities or a similar condition, 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.

Illinois is an Employment First state, supporting and promoting community-based, integrated employment as the first option for employment for individuals with disabilities. Employment assistance is provided through a variety of methods to individuals with Most Significant disabilities in maintaining competitive, integrated community employment. Competitive integrated employment is full or part-time work which pays a customer (employee) not less than the local minimum wage, is at a community location working alongside persons without disabilities and presents opportunities for benefits and advancement like other employees in similar positions.

Eligibility

Individuals are eligible for CE once they have been identified, referred to IDHS-DRS, determined eligible as having a [Most Significant](#) Disability, and have a demonstrated need for this service. The determination is made by the IDHS-DRS Rehabilitation

Counselor by answering a set of questions about the customer's work history and an [assessment of functional limitations](#).

Providers

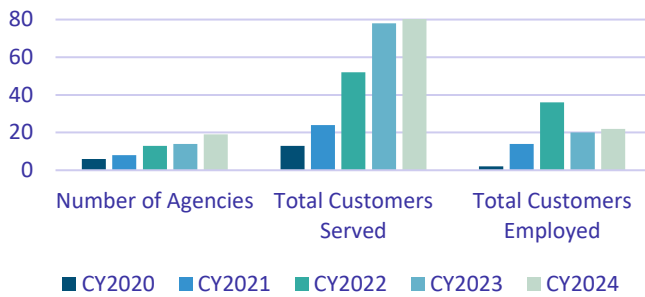
Any Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) doing business with IDHS-DRS must meet the requirements set forth in [89 ILCS 530: Criteria for the Evaluation of Programs of services in Community Rehabilitation Agencies](#). To implement a Customized Employment Program, CRP's are required to enter into a contract with IDHS-DRS and are also required to have at least one staff member certified in Customized Employment through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) or other qualified training entity. CE contract provisions are outlined in the [IDHS-DRS Community Rehabilitation Program Manual](#). During service provision, a staffing between the customer, IDHS-DRS, and CRP's are expected to occur every 8 weeks and continue during the length of the case, up to 24 months.

Customized Employment Pilot Program

The CE Pilot Program spanned from January 1, 2020- December 31, 2024. During the Pilot, 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 developed a contract for Customized Employment. The first CE contract took effect July 1, 2020, with six organizations spanning all IDHS-DRS regions, ensuring statewide implementation of the CE Program.

Pilot Program Results

Customized Employment
CY2020-CY2024



Pilot Year Five CY 2024

- **Nineteen (19)** CE Contracts (6/6 DRS regions)
- Total Allocation for 19 Contracts: **\$1,702,560**
- Total Customers Served: **145**
- Total Customers Achieving CIE: **22**

Pilot Year Four CY 2023

- **Fourteen (14)** CE Contracts with three more pending for SFY2025 (5/6 DRS Regions)
- Total Allocation for Fourteen Contracts: **\$832,200.00**
- Total Customers Served: **78**
- Total Customers Achieving CIE: **20** (Many participants were in the middle of the CE experience)

Pilot Year Three CY 2022

- **Thirteen (13)** CE Contracts (5/6 regions represented)
- Total Allocation for Thirteen Contracts: **\$735,300.00**
- Total Customers Served: **52**
- Total Customers Achieving CIE: **36**

Pilot Year Two CY 2021

- **Eight (8)** CE Contracts (4/5 DRS Regions)
- Total Allocation for Eight Contracts for CY2021: **\$655,200.00**
- Total Customers Served: **24**
- Total Customers Achieving CIE: **14**

Pilot Year One CY 2020

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

Customized Employment Demonstration Program

The CE Demonstration Program will span January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2029, and support competitive integrated employment for individuals with a significant disability. CE is:

- Grounded on individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual,
- Designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual,
- Intended to meet the business needs of the employer by negotiating a relationship between the employer and the employee, and
- Based on exchange of specific contributions by the employee for pay by the employer that is at or above the applicable minimum wage.

The CE Demonstration Program, as amended, will comply with the WINTAC [“Essential Elements of Customized Employment for Universal Application”](#). The Program is comprised of five phases.

Phase One: Consultation and Initiation

Pre-discovery activities introduce the participant to CE activities, roles and responsibilities, and expected outcomes. Pre-discovery also introduces the CE provider to the participant, the participants support team, including family, guardians, friends, colleagues, advocates, community-based service agencies, and others as determined by the participant or the participant’s guardian. If the participant chooses to proceed with CE, then IDHS-DRS will develop an Initial Discovery Action Plan.

Phase Two: Discovery

Discovery is a person-centered planning process, guided by the participant and/or their guardian, and is used to determine the participant’s interests, skills, preferences, and ideal employment conditions. Discovery explores the unique needs of the participant, including assistive technology and the need for work incentives benefits counseling. A Discovery Plan and a Discovery Profile is developed, discussed, and shared by the CE provider to the participant, participant’s guardian, and IDHS-DRS.

Phase Three: Customized Employment Planning

CE planning is an opportunity to use the information learned during discover to develop a plan for competitive and integrated employment.

Phase Four: Job Development and Negotiation

Job development and negotiation is a process of working collaboratively with the participant, the participant’s guardian, and the employer to negotiate a customized job, including terms of employment, conditions necessary for success, and the specific unmet needs of the employer that shall be filled by the participant’s contributions.

Phase Five: Post-Employment Support and Monitoring

Support and monitoring of the CE service ensures satisfactory results for both the participant and the employer.

Recommendations

Program Challenges

The CE Pilot Program has experienced several challenges.

Contracts have increased from six to nineteen providers (≈31%). 15% of the 19 providers have decided not to renew or have not utilized the contract.

- Customers served under CE achieving CIE has fluctuated. Success rate increases are not following the same positive progression as the increase in enrollees.

Calendar Year	Customers Enrolled	Customers Achieving CIE	Success Rate
2020	13	2	15%
2021	24	14	58%
2022	52	36	69%
2023	78	20	25%
2024	145	22	15%
Totals	312	94	30%

- Adequate referrals to CE programs.
- Vocational rehabilitation knowledge and understanding of the CE Program.
- Agency knowledge and understanding of CE tenets.
- Implementing the CE Program with fidelity.
- Establishing relationships with employers willing to customize positions.
- Finding employers willing to hire persons with ongoing support needs.
- The provision of CE can take up to 24 months.

Statewide Program

Illinois should thoughtfully consider the following when determining broader expansion and full adoption of the CE Program:

- Capacity to provide continued and ongoing CE training to program providers.
- Statewide gaps in service provision.
- Nature, scope, and delivery of CE technical assistance.
- Capacity to engage schools, CRP's, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and supervisors, and other support services such as benefits planning.

Demonstration Program Improvements

The following improvements could be made to further the CE Program:

- Improve data collection measures to align with the Customized Employment Act as amended.
- Incorporate benefits planning for customers and their families.
- Expand CE education, training, and technical assistance efforts for providers and employers.
- Develop standardized forms and resources to include an Initial Discovery Action Plan, Discovery Plan, Discovery Profile, and Monitoring plans.
- IDHS-DRS and IDHS-DDD should develop a protocol for customers transitioning from one service provider to the other to ensure consistency and continuity of service provision.
- Improve relationships, training and education efforts, and gain feedback from employers engaged with CE.
- Conduct a study to understand barriers providers are encountering preventing customers from achieving a CIE outcome.

Conclusion

The CE Pilot has been in effect since 1/1/20. The process led to the implementation of a CE contract (effective 7/1/20) to serve at least 25 new CE individuals over the course of the five-year pilot period. During the pilot, the IDHS-DRS underwent a rate setting study in 2023, which positively impacted the rates providers are paid to provide CE services by 14%.

The results through 12/31/24 show a total of **312 individuals served** with **94** of those individuals **obtaining competitive integrated employment**, exceeding initial goals service goals by more than **1100%**. Service goals have exceeded expectations, Customized Employment **success rate** lands at **30%**, which is higher than the overall success rate of VR customers served by IDHS-DRS reported in [SFY2024](#). Budgeted cost per customer engaged in competitive integrated employment services in 2024 is \$15,514 for completion of all CE phases. IDHS-DRS spent 58% of its allotted funds, spending **\$992,492** on CE services in 2024.

The completion of all five CE phases is time intensive. The investment of time leads to quality employment for customers ultimately is desired over rapid outcomes. IDHS-DRS is committed to implementing the Customized Employment Demonstration Program, with the intent of evaluating efficacy at the end of the demonstration to determine statewide, long-term implementation.

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

Appendix

Participating Agencies

Provider	Location	Region
Avenues to Independence	Park Ridge, IL	1
AID	Aurora and Elgin, IL	2
Centerstone of Illinois	West Frankfort, IL	5
Challenge Unlimited	Fairview Heights, IL	5
Coleman Tri-County Services	Harrisburg, IL	5
Community Choices	Champaign, IL	4
CTF Illinois	Orland Park, IL	2
EPIC	Peoria, IL	3
Human Support Services	Waterloo, IL	5
Individual Advocacy Group	Romeoville, IL	2
Jewish Child and Family Services	Chicago, IL	1
KCCDD, Inc. (Thrive Community Services)	Galesburg, IL	3
Kreider Services, Inc.	Dixon, IL	2
Little City Foundation	Chicago, IL	1
Michelle's Vocational Placement, LLC	Davenport, IA	2
Streator Unlimited	Streator, IL	3
The ARC of Quad Cities	Chicago, IL	1
The Workshop	Galena, IL	2
Total Link 2Community	Northbrook, IL	1
UCP Seguin	Chicago, IL	1