



JB Pritzker, Governor


Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary

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DATE: 2/26/26

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: Illinois Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act 2025 Annual Report

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the *Illinois Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act 2025 Annual Report* on behalf of the Division of Rehabilitation Services in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in 820 ILCS 97.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Karie Frazier, DRS Sr. Policy Advisor, at Karie.Frazier@illinois.gov or (217)851-6622.

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 (820 ILCS 97) 2025 Annual Report



Jacob's Success Story

Jacob was referred to the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) on December 30, 2019, by Central Community High School in Breese, Illinois. Jacob had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) under Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), depression and Tourette's Syndrome. He required specialized educational instruction and accommodations to aid in his academic and employment success. Jacob made many gains while participating in the extended transition program at Central Community High School in conjunction with the Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) offered through DRS. Once Jacob exited high school in May 2024, he was determined to seek competitive employment in the community. Jacob's DRS counselor referred him to Human Support Services (HSS) in Waterloo to receive Customized Employment (CE) job placement services to ensure he could succeed in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE.) Jacob's counselors helped him address several challenging behaviors, including frequent body tics, verbal outbursts, and snorting. These symptoms are exasperated when he is stressed and frustrated and would otherwise make maintaining employment difficult. During the discovery phase of the process, Human Support Services reached Southern Bus & Mobility to inquire if they would be willing to hire Jacob with CE support. Jacob volunteered at Southern Bus during one of the nonpaid work shadow experiences while

participating in the extended transition program in high school. Jacob shared that he really liked the staff there and would like to work at Southern Bus.

With assistance from Human Support Services Jacob was hired as a bus detailer at Southern Bus and Mobility in Breese on 07/15/2024, just months after completing his STEP transition services. He was initially hired to work 10 hours per week. After completing all nine phases of Customized Employment and working 90 days without support, Jacob's hours were increased to 15 hours per week. Jacob has overcome challenges and developed strong relationships with coworkers and supervisors at Southern Bus and Mobility, who are now considered his natural support. Jacob's DRS case was closed successfully on August 18, 2025. Jacob continues to be employed at Southern bus and mobility as a detailer. He enjoys working and is very excited to be recognized as a DRS success story.



Background

The Illinois Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act was enacted January 1, 2020, and amended effective 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 and operate a CE Pilot Program and as amended, to implement a CE Demonstration Program.

The Demonstration Program aligns with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center's (WINTAC) *Essential Elements of Customized Employment for Universal Application* and is designed to expand access to individualized employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities. The Illinois Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act establishes a statewide framework for implementing CE practices and requires that at least 100 individuals be served through the Demonstration Program by December 31, 2029.

This annual report provides a summary of the program implementation and outcomes for the period of January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

Purpose

The purpose of the Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act (820 ILCS 97) is to support individuals with the most significant disabilities, including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities or similar conditions, who seek employment and require highly individualized services to achieve and maintain CIE.

Customized Employment is grounded in a person-centered process that uses discovery, customized planning, and individualized job development

and negotiation to match an individual's strengths, interests, and support needs with the specific needs of employers.

In the summer of 2013, Illinois enacted the Illinois Employment First Act. Employment First is a public policy approach founded in the presumption individuals with disabilities can work in typical community jobs and earn at least minimum wage alongside coworkers without disabilities when they receive necessary support. The Employment First Act directs state agencies to align programs, funding, and services to support CIE rather than segregated or community day services. IDHS-DRS aligns its services with the statewide Employment First policy, which establishes integrated, community-based employment as the first and preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities. Through the CE Demonstration program, IDHS-DRS and DDD support individuals in obtaining and maintaining CIE that pays at or above minimum wage, is performed in community-based settings alongside individuals without disabilities and offers opportunities for advancement and benefits comparable to those available to other employees in similar positions. In alignment with Illinois' Employment First policy, CIE shall be considered the first option when serving people with disabilities of working age.

Target Population

Customers:

Individuals participating in the CE Demonstration Program are referred to IDHS-DRS and must:

- Be determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services
- Meet Criteria for Most Significant Disability (per 90 Ill. Adm. Code 553.140 Criteria)

- Require highly individualized placement services as determined by the IDHS-DRS Rehabilitation Counselor (per Section 553.100 Assessment)

CE services are authorized through the customer's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The IPE is developed collaboratively by the customer, members of the customer's support team, and the IDHS-DRS Rehabilitation Counselor. The plan outlines the approved services, service timelines, and documents the customer's choice of service provider.

Providers:

All Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) participating in the CE Demonstration Project must meet the requirements set forth in 89 Ill Adm. Code 530: Criteria for the Evaluation of Programs of services in Community Rehabilitation Agencies and have at least one member certified in Customized Employment through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) or other qualified training entity.

During service provision, case coordination meetings between the customer, IDHS-DRS, and CRP occur every eight weeks and may continue throughout the length of the case, up to 24 months.

Program Structure

The Customized Employment Demonstration Program is structured across five phases:

Phase One: Consultation and Initiation

Pre-discovery activities introduce the customer to CE activities, roles and responsibilities, and expected outcomes. Pre-discovery also introduces the CE provider to the customer, the customer's support

team, including family, guardians, friends, colleagues, advocates, community-based service agencies, and others as determined by the customer or the customer's guardian. If the customer 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 customer and/or their guardian, and is used to determine the customer's interests, skills, preferences, and ideal employment conditions. Discovery explores the unique needs of the customer, 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 customer, customer's guardian, and IDHS-DRS.

Phase Three: Customized Employment Planning

CE planning is an opportunity to use the information learned during discovery 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 customer, the customer'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 customer's contributions.

Phase Five: Post-Employment Support and Monitoring

Support and monitoring of the CE service ensures satisfactory results for both the customer and the employer. Supports continue every

eight weeks from Phase 5.1 through Phase 5.5 for a total of 10 months.

Upon completion of Phase 5.5, the customer's case is successfully closed with IDHS-DRS. Following case closure, individuals may access Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), as appropriate, to support ongoing employment stability and long-term success.

Program Outcomes

The CE Pilot program operated with CRP's across IDHS-DRS regions from January 1, 2020, until December 31, 2024. Key outcomes from those five years include:

- Total Customers served: 312
- Total Customers achieving CIE: 94
- Average cost per customer: \$15,514
- Average annual expenditure: \$875,322.00
- CE success rate: 30% average

(Exceeding the overall VR success rate reported in SFY 2024)

Maintaining the same program structure, including 19 CRPs across IDHS-DRS regions and the five-phase model, CE Demonstration Year One results for January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025, are as follows:

- Total Customers served: 156
 - Total Customers achieving CIE: 73
 - Average cost per customer: \$15,514
 - Expenditure for the year: \$1,151,900.00
 - CE Success rate: 46.8%
- (17% increase in success over the pilot program years)
- Number of customers with an intellectual disability: 24

- Number of customers with a developmental disability: 42
 - Average amount of time a customer spends in each phase: 8 weeks
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Program Challenges

- Strengthening collaboration and employer partnerships to ensure understanding of individual’s ongoing support needs.
 - Limited staffing levels within CRPs.
 - CRPs are not consistently following CE methodology.
 - Limited data tracking measures.
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Program Successes

- Completion of Mark Goldberg customized training for all CE providers
 - Creation of standardized forms, including:
 - IL 488-4669 Discovery Action Plan
 - IL488-4668 Customized Employment Discovery Profile
 - Updated contract structure and pricing to align with the phases outlined in statute (Phases 1-5.5)
 - Collaboration among partners including a webinar titled “Employment Collaboration: Services and Supports through DRS & DDD” Tuesday, November 18, 2025
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Conclusion

The following are recommended next steps to further strengthen the Customized Employment Demonstration Program:

- Conduct a study with providers to identify barriers that prevent customers from achieving CIE outcomes.
- Continue to expand CE education, training, and technical assistance for providers and employers.
- Improve data collection measures to align with statutory reporting requirements.
- IDHS-DRS and IDHS-DDD should develop a protocol for customers transitioning from one division to another to ensure service continuity.

DRS is committed to strengthening the Customized Employment Demonstration Program, which shows strong promise in improving employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Continued investment in provider capacity, training, and data infrastructure will be critical to ensuring long-term sustainability and scalability of Customized Employment services across Illinois.

Appendix A: Participating CRPs

Community Rehabilitation Program	Location	Region
Association for Individual Development	Park Ridge, IL	1
Centerstone of Illinois Inc	Aurora and Elgin, IL	5
Challenge Unlimited Inc.	Fairview Hts., IL	5
Coleman Tri County Services Inc.	Harrisburg, IL	5
Community Choices Inc.	Champagne, IL	4
CTF Illinois	Orland Park, IL	2
EPIC	Peoria, IL	3

Community Rehabilitation Program	Location	Region
Human Resources of Edgar and Clark Counties *New*		4
Human Support Services	Waterloo, IL	5
Individual Advocacy Group Inc.	Romeoville, IL	2
Jewish Child and Family Services	Chicago, IL	1
KCCDD, Inc.	Galesburg, IL	3
Kreider Services Inc.	Dixon, IL	2
Little City Foundation	Chicago, IL	1
Streator Unlimited	Streator, IL	3
The Arc of the Quad Cities	Chicago, IL	1
The Workshop	Galena, IL	2
Total Link to Community Cooperative	Northbrook, IL	1
United Cerebral Palsy-Seguin of Greater Chicago	Chicago, IL	1