

Supported Employment in Vermont is Competitive and Integrated

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THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
**CENTER ON DISABILITY &
COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

Data Briefs are straightforward summaries of a topic supported by data and references.

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PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEF:

This data brief is about the history of employment for Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It looks at what has changed, and how that has affected how many people with disabilities can find and keep jobs.

In 2002, when Vermont closed sheltered workshops, and stopped paying people with disabilities less than the minimum wage, it received national and international attention. People see Vermont as an example of how to help people with disabilities find and keep jobs. That means it's important to look at the data, and talk about the historical context.

Some people who want to keep paying people with disabilities less than the minimum wage say that supported employment has not benefited people with disabilities, both in Vermont and in other states. One of these people told the Minnesota legislature, that the employment of Vermonters with disabilities is "deeply disturbing". They also said: "In Vermont, there are now fewer developmentally disabled adults in supported employment than in 2002, when employment workshops closed" (Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Human Services, 2023).

But data tells us that's not a true statement.

BACKGROUND:

Vermont is a small rural state with the nation's second-smallest population. Based on the 2021 data, the population of Vermont is 645,570. Much of the population is in the Chittenden County area.

When Brandon Training School closed in 1993 it changed how the state treated care for individuals with developmental disabilities (IDD). Closing the Brandon School marked the end

of Vermont relying on putting people with disabilities in institutions. It underscored Vermont's commitment to create ways for people with disabilities to live with dignity, respect and independence in their communities.

1996 DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ACT

The Vermont State Legislature passed the Developmental Disabilities Act in 1996. This law requires the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) to use the [State System of Care Plan](#) as they provide developmental disabilities services. The System of Care Plan tells DAIL what services, how much service, when services are available, and who gets services for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

The System of Care Plan tells DAIL how the money Vermont's legislatures gives them should be spent to:

- Serve individuals with significant developmental disabilities.
- Help people achieve their personal goals.
- Continuously improve the system that supports individuals with developmental disabilities within available resources.

The adult service system is not an entitlement program.

Since there's never enough resources to meet everyone's needs, the State of Vermont established eligibility criteria. Those criteria are set by the designated disability services agency in each county. Overall, the System of Care Plan is designed to serve those with the greatest need.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN VERMONT

Vermont launched its first community-based supported employment program in 1980. The State of Vermont created this first program because they believe that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities could have regular jobs in the community.

The overall success of the first program led the U.S. Department of Education-Rehabilitation Services Administration to give states like Vermont multi-year grants. This money is for creating and running statewide supported employment efforts.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the U.S. Department of Education gave all states nationwide more than \$100 million. This paid for more than 55 three-to-five-year grants (Mank, 1994).

In 1982 the U.S. Department of Education gave the University of Vermont a grant. This let the University of Vermont start helping to expand the first supported employment program. (Masterson, 2016).

Sheltered workshops are places where people with disabilities work separately from other people. In sheltered workshops, sometimes people with disabilities are paid less than minimum wage. In Vermont, sheltered workshops began to close when technical assistance programs became available, and people with disabilities found employment in the community. People with disabilities began to receive other developmental disabilities services as well, such as community supports and home supports.

Vermont cut off funding for new sheltered workshops in 2000.

Then in 2002, Vermont closed its last sheltered workshop. This made Vermont the first state to have no sheltered workshops.

WHAT IS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT?

According to the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL):

“Supported employment involves a wide range of services, including person-centered employment planning, job search assistance, assistance in negotiating job accommodation or modification, on the job training, follow-along services for duration of employment, career enhancement supports, and advocacy skills.”

—Vermont DAIL, 2023a

People get different services when they have supported employment. Many people with disabilities who receive supported employment services are working. Other people with disabilities may be searching for jobs or between jobs.

Important: supported employment in Vermont includes only individual placements. This means that supported employment services in Vermont help each person with a disability find their own job, rather than putting a group of people with disabilities together. In addition, some people with disabilities in Vermont find jobs without getting supported employment services.

In 2018, a survey of Vermonters with IDD found that 36% were working. 24% of those working were not receiving supported employment services (National Core Indicators, 2019).

THE GOAL OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The goal of supported employment services is that each person with a disability gets *competitive integrated employment*.

That means finding a job that is full or part-time that has the same opportunities that a person without disabilities would get. Those opportunities include getting the same salary, same benefits, and same opportunities to get promoted. The job should also be located in the community, and provide interactions with people without disabilities. (State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program; State Supported Employment Services Program; Limitations on Use of Subminimum Wage, 2016).

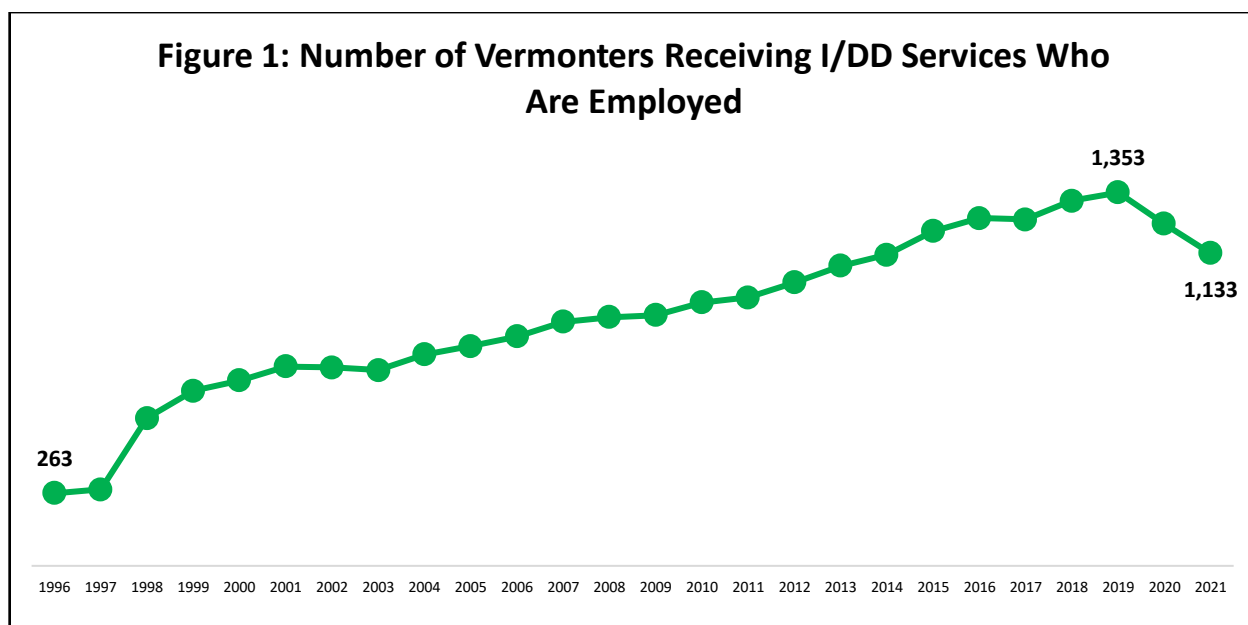
QUESTIONS RAISED ABOUT SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

This section is about data from Vermont, as well as history. Some people want to continue paying people with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage. Those people also want to keep sheltered workshops available for people with disabilities. Those people generally ask two questions:

1. Will people with disabilities still have opportunities to work?
2. Will taking away subminimum wage take away choices for people with disabilities?

This section answers those two questions.

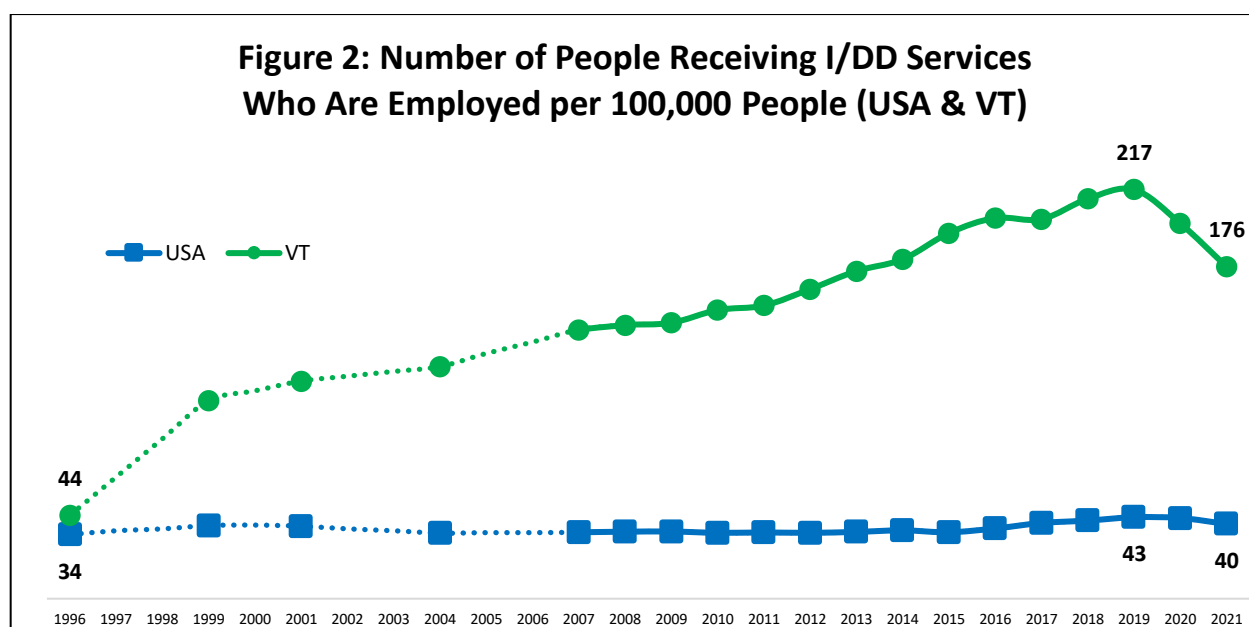
<p>QUESTION 1:</p> <p>Will people with disabilities still have opportunities to work?</p>	<p>The number of Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities (also called I/DD) who get supported employment services and who have jobs increased steadily before COVID.</p> <p>Fewer people with disabilities got jobs in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic meant that there were less direct support workers available to help. Many businesses also closed during the pandemic, so no one could work there.</p> <p>In 1996, 263 people who got supported employment services in Vermont had jobs. In 2019, 1,353 people who got supported employment services had jobs. (Vermont DAIL, 2023b). That is 414% more from 1996 to 2019.</p> <p>At the same time, the population of Vermont increased by only 14% (U.S. Census, 2021).</p> <p>We can also look at the time after the last sheltered workshop was closed in 2002. Between 2002 and 2019, 88% more people were working.</p> <p>Figure 1 is a chart. It shows the number of Vermonters with I/DD</p>
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Note: Fewer Vermonters had jobs in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But what do these numbers mean when you look at everyone – with and without disabilities – living in Vermont at the time?

The number of Vermonters receiving I/DD services who were employed per 100,000 people in the population has been steadily increasing over time. This rate is also much higher than the total rate for the United States. These numbers are in the chart labeled “Figure 2”. And like in Figure 1, this rate decreased significantly in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (StateData, 2023a).



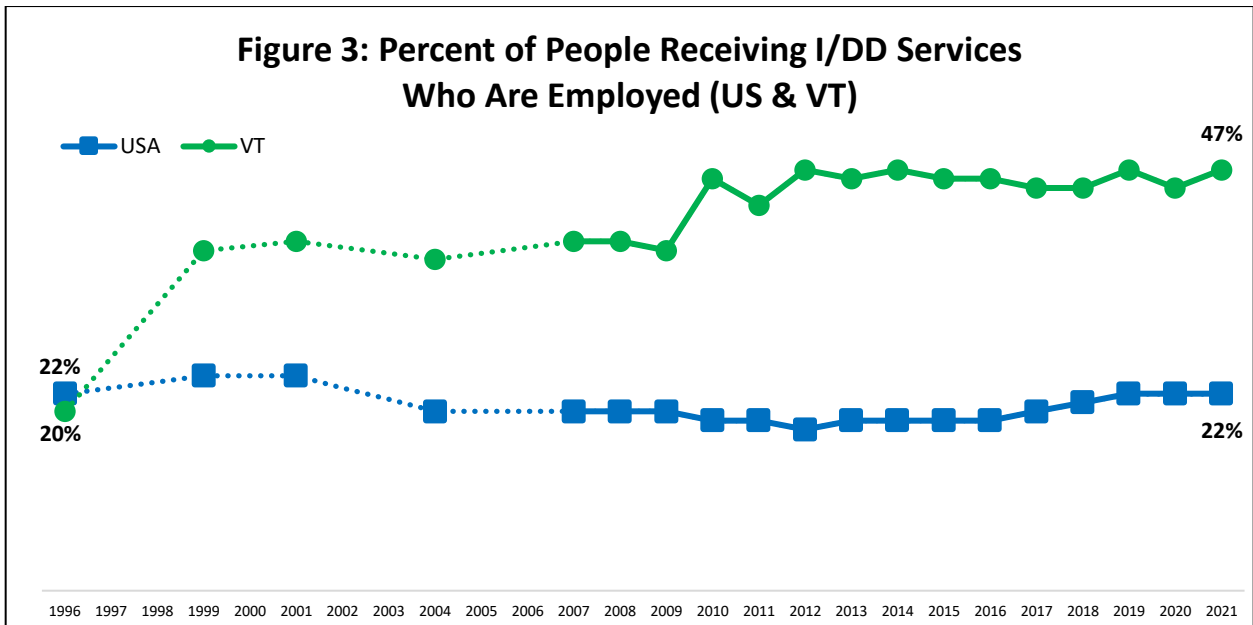
Note: the data about this is not available for all years. Dotted lines show where no data was collected. There was a drop in the data in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, we can look at the number of people working as a percentage of everyone receiving I/DD supported employment services.

In 1996, the number of people in Vermont who got I/DD services and also had jobs was a lot like the number of people in all states who got I/DD services and also had jobs. In 1996, it was 20% in Vermont and 22% for the United States as a whole. And in Vermont that number went up from 1996 to 2010.

Since 2010, the number has stayed pretty much the same. Since 2010, the number for all of the United States has stayed the same: 22% (StateData, 2023b).

The agency that ran the last sheltered workshop had an employment rate of 66% in 2021. (Vermont DAIL, 2022b).



Note: Data not available for all years. Dotted lines show gaps in data collection.

QUESTION 2:

Will eliminating subminimum wage take away choices?

In Vermont, the agencies that used to manage sheltered workshops now provide support community-based employment. And in fact, those agencies have generally grown, and offer more services. People with disabilities who need a lot of support were not left behind. Supported employment, including self-employment, can help people who need a lot of support find jobs.

Moving from sheltered workshops to supported employment in the community also changes the resources available.

Because Vermont doesn't have sheltered workshops, it has other opportunities for people with disabilities to find jobs. These opportunities include:

- [Project Search](#) (2011) in 3 locations.
- Post-secondary education programs like [Think College at the University of Vermont](#) (2010).
- [College Steps](#) (2011) at 3 state colleges.
- [SUCCEED](#) (2007), a post-secondary transitional living program.

Some who would have been in sheltered workshops in Vermont are now students in these programs. And these programs help them find jobs.

The international [Zero Project](#) is an organization that wants to create a world with zero barriers. Worldwide, the Zero Project finds and shares solutions that improve the daily lives and legal rights of all persons with disabilities. The Zero Project has recognized the State of Vermont twice for good work.

Plus, in 2017, Vermont was awarded the [Policy Award for Inclusive Employment](#). Finally, in 2021, Vermont was awarded another [Policy Award for Post-Secondary Education Initiative](#).

CONCLUSIONS

The number of Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving supported employment has steadily increased over time.

The data shows that Vermonters with I/DD who get supported employment services find more jobs every year. The number of people with disabilities who find jobs has gone up since the last sheltered employment workshop closed.

It is true that people found less jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. But it is not true that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have fewer employment opportunities in Vermont.

Limitations of this data brief:

Here is what this data brief can't do:

First, we cannot report on the total number of people living in Vermont with I/DD who are working. There's only data that looks at people who get I/DD services.

Second, data about how Vermont does compared to all of the United States is not available for all years. StateData, is a project of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. They provided the data for most of the years. They collect data by surveying state developmental services agencies. They only started doing the survey every year in 2007.

Finally, there's no current data available on the kind of jobs, pay, and number of hours worked. So that data isn't in this report.

What can we learn from Vermont?

Today there are many more choices than paying people with disabilities less than the minimum wage. There are a lot of other ways to help people with disabilities get and keep jobs.

Vermont has improved services for people with disabilities over the years. There are now services for:

- Supported employment.
- Customized employment.
- Self-employment.
- Education programs after high school.

When people with disabilities are in their communities as employees, coworkers, and business owners, the community is a better place. Employers will hire and include people with disabilities at a competitive wage because people want to work. People with disabilities are good, reliable employees.

When there are no sheltered workshops, but there are supported employment services, people with disabilities can more easily find and keep jobs.

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