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“Everything in his life has changed...”

Clark County’s Family Grants Program

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For more information on the Family Grants Program or other system development initiatives in Clark County, contact Mary Strehlow, Program Manager, Clark County Department of Community Services Developmental Disabilities Program, P.O. Box 5000, Vancouver, WA 98666.

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Program setting

Clark County is Washington State's fastest growing county. Located across the Columbia River from Portland, OR, its population has almost tripled since 1980, growing to 317,000 as suburban development has spread into rural areas around the city of Vancouver and a growing number of industries have settled in the county.

Under the management of the County Board of Commissioners, the Clark County Department of Community Services operates the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Program, mandated by state law to plan, coordinate, and provide services to people with developmental disabilities and their families. * For more than ten years, the DD Program has thoughtfully followed a systematic process of improving early intervention and adult day services. This process is guided by strategic plans developed and revised with broad community participation to pursue the county's mission:

Clark County will assist all people with developmental disabilities to have the opportunity to achieve full, active, integrated and productive lives.

The DD Program participates early in initiatives that show promise for increasing the power available to families and people with developmental disabilities and promoting their inclusion in community life. The County DD Program exercises consistent leadership in its partnerships: people from outside the county who represent positive projects find strong partners who expect to shape outside initiatives that contribute to the development of their overall

* Washington State uniquely divides responsibility for community services to people with developmental disabilities. Counties have responsibility for early intervention and adult day services. They receive state funds through contracts with the state Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and have the option of adding local funds. Through its regional offices, DDD directly provides case management, provides or contracts for residential services (including institutions, group homes, and supportive living) and family support (including respite, attendant care/personal care, and therapeutic services). Case managers have responsibility for eligibility determination, individual service planning, referral, and authorization of services and, through their union, have protected these functions from assignment to people employed by or contracted by county programs.

system. Supported employment has been the main focus of programmatic development in adult services through both five-year strategic planning cycles. For several years, contracts with service providers have incorporated the principle of choice, which makes it possible for money to move with people among contracted service providers.

The Family Grants program, initiated in 1996, strengthens choice for the families of young people graduating or recently graduated from high school by offering the opportunity to direct a budget of up to \$4,500 to support establishing their sons and daughters in a job. What participants in this small program have achieved so far holds interesting lessons for others who want to increase families' power to shape a desirable future for their young adult sons and daughters and support positive transitions from school to work, as this brief program description* tries to show. The County DD Program's overall pattern of policies and services will be of interest to people looking for benchmarks of system performance.

Program description*

The Family Grants program offers families with developmentally disabled members who graduate from school with an interest in a paid job in a community workplace the option of choosing to receive help in making and implementing a person-centered employment plan and cash assistance of up to \$4,500. The process of person-centered employment planning includes an orientation to the adult services system, a profile of the person's job and career

* This description is based on a visit from 26-28 August 1998. We were invited by Mary Strehlow, Clark County Developmental Disabilities Program Manager, to assist her to review the program as it moves into its third year. In addition to Mary Strehlow, we interviewed four of the ten family grant recipients (a fifth interview was cancelled and the other families have only recently begun the process), Lyn McIntyre, the staff person from the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE), which contracts with Clark County to administer Family Grants, and the managers of two supported employment vendors who have been hired by people with Family Grants. Both the DDD Case Manager and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor assigned to the families had to cancel their scheduled interviews.

* Also see the Letter to Families on page 17 and The Family Grants Process description on page 18

interests, individualized strategies for job development and on the job assistance that focus on natural supports, linkage to Vocational Rehabilitation and other funding and service resources for necessary short-term and long-term support, and consultation and help in problem solving as a person finds and gets established on a job. Through an intermediary organization, The Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE), families direct payment of the cash assistance provided by Clark County as they implement their plan. The WISE staff member also assists in the preparation and implementation of the person-centered employment plan by providing training, planning assistance, and consultation to families. The same WISE staff person has assisted all of the families involved in the program.

Graduates whose families do not choose the Family Grants program either move directly into competitive employment with time limited support from Vocational Rehabilitation or do not want any adult services (20% of 1997 graduates) or they accept a slot with long-term county funding in a supported employment service (73% of 1997 graduates), a community access service (3% of 1997 graduates), or the specialized industry (0% of 1997 graduates).

Ten families have chosen the Family Grants program since it started in February of 1996 and five families are currently active. The program is voluntary. Families of graduates are informed about the program, apply, and participate in a selection process. Families who complete the program have the option to reengage with it in order to make new plans, and participation in the Family Grants program does not reduce a person's prospects for long-term funding through the County DD program. If a person needs long-term funding, the DD program will work with them to find it.

Though the Family Grants program is small, accounting so far for only about 3% of the people Clark County assists with day services and a much smaller fraction of the county DD budget, it embodies important themes and lessons about choice and family participation.

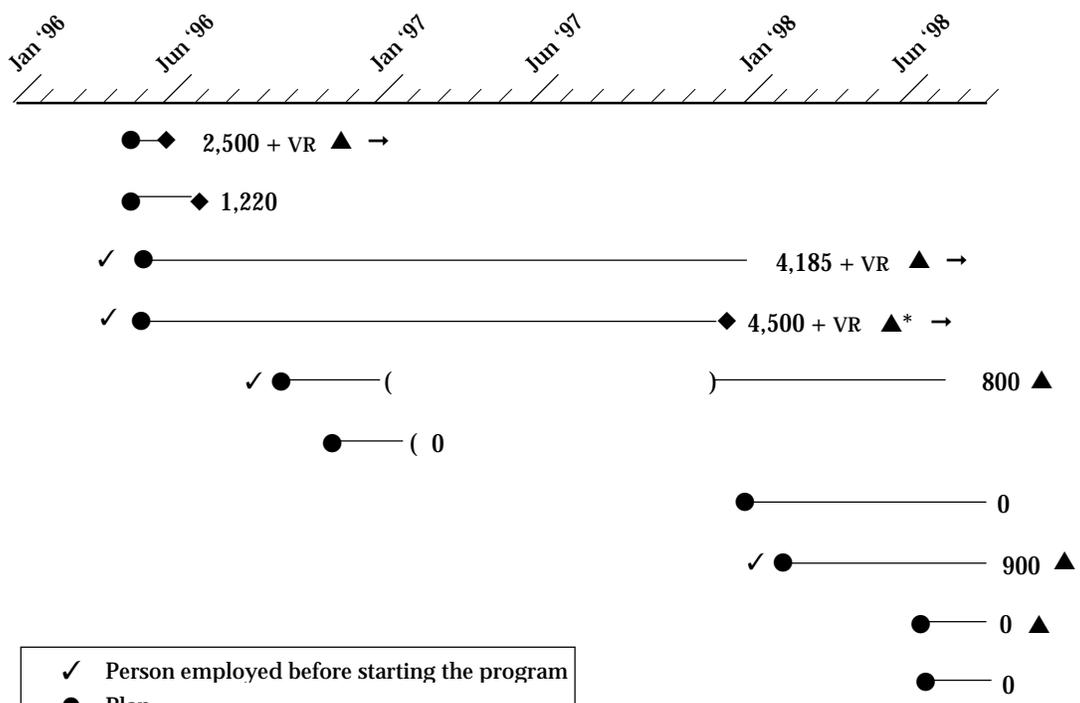
Outcomes to date

The table below summarizes the outcomes for the five families who have completed the program in terms of the job and career objectives specified in their person-centered employment plans.

Achieved planned objective	3
Employed but planned objective not achieved	1
Left county before plan was implemented	1

- Three of the people who have completed joined the program with a paid job and planned for a change that would improve their career prospects; one of those people accomplished the desired change, the other remains employed but did not achieve their objective. The third person, who paused involvement with the program for about a year and then re-engaged, has not yet achieved the change she wanted, though she has gotten a second part time job.
- All but one of the families who have completed planning have used program funds to hire one of the County's supported employment vendors to assist in job development and support. One family has changed supported employment providers to get a better match with their objectives.
- Three families used the flexibility of the Family Grants program to hire an individual to assist with job development. Two of these families subsequently hired a supported employment vendor.
- Three of the four people who remain employed require some level of long term support. One person has begun to pay for support from a supported employment vendor from his salary and one person has benefited from his employers continuing commitment to supported employment and the County's pledge of funds for necessary additional support. One family, who left the Family Grants program with their objective unmet, has unsuccessfully tried a PASS plan and unsuccessfully tried family support on the job as means to move toward their objective. The person who is fully naturally supported on his part-time job is the person whose family did not use a supported employment vendor.

This diagram summarizes the program's history with its participants.

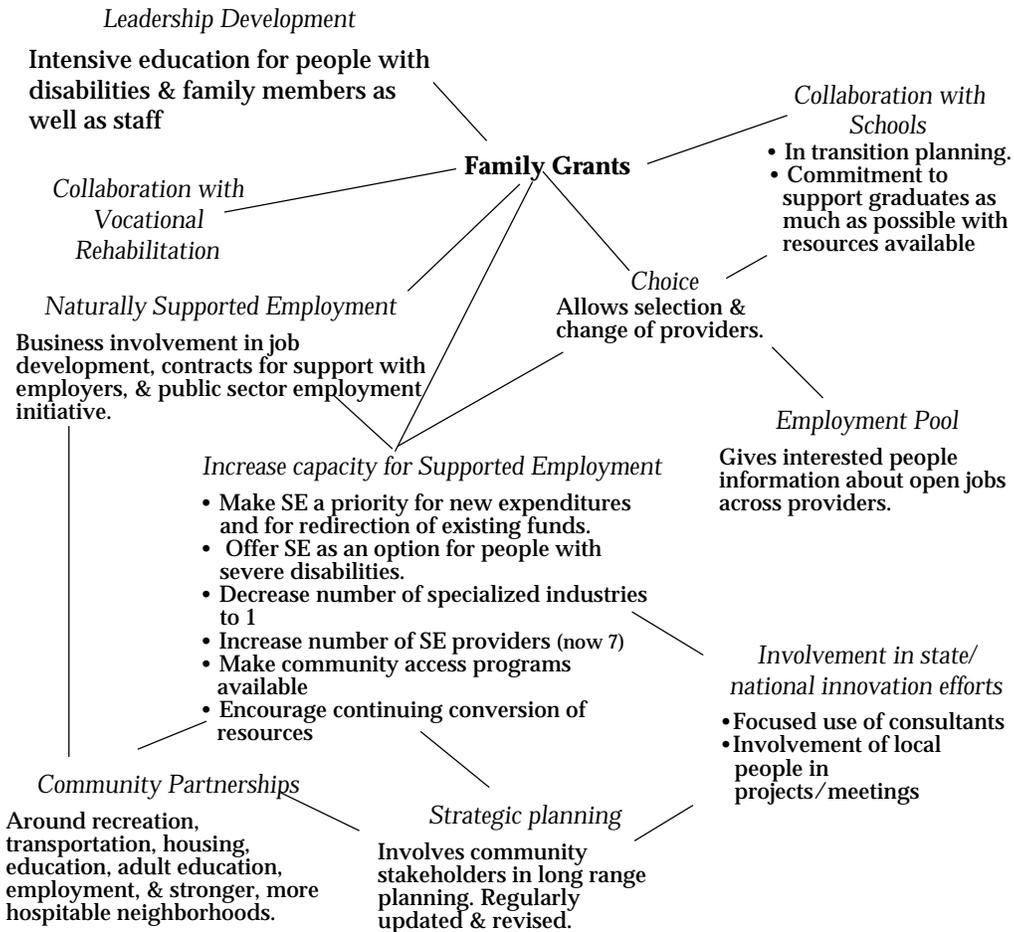


- ✓ Person employed before starting the program
- Plan
- ◆ Employment objective met
- (Person withdrew
-) Person reengaged
- 000 Family Grant dollars expended to date
- + VR Used Vocational Rehabilitation funds
- ▲* Supported employment vendor (* changed vendors)
- Some paid long term support necessary

Program context

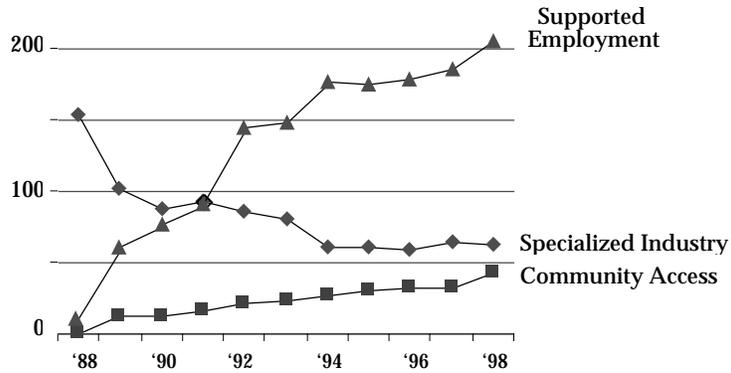
The Family Grants program is one of an interlocked set of policies adopted by the Clark County DD Program over the past ten years. These policies coherently express three principles: **choice**, so that people and families have the power to select from among options; **inclusion**, so that people and families have the opportunity for participation in all aspects of community life; and **partnership**, so that people and families have the opportunity to benefit from the full range of

available formal and informal supports. The diagram below maps the policies linked to the Family Grants Program.



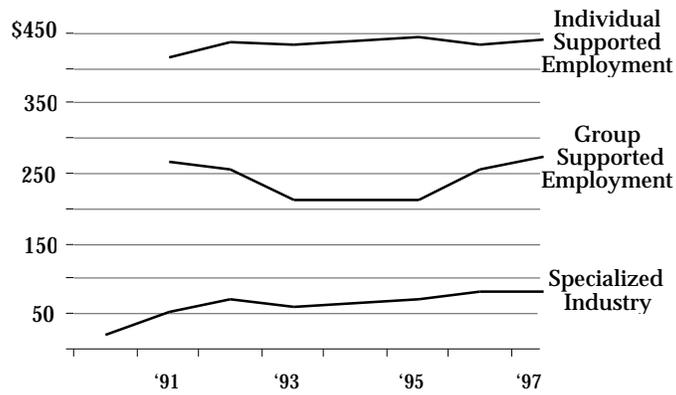
The results of the County DD Program’s focus on increasing opportunities for supported employment and community inclusion have been substantial. As the graphs below depict, the system has grown, almost doubling in size, while the proportion of people in supported employment has grown from about 7% to about 66%. Community access programs, developed to support people’s inclusion in community activities, have grown to support about 14% of people. A concentration on naturally supported employment has had results not reflected on the graphs. More than 40 people have left the system because the supports available from their employers and coworkers are sufficient to sustain them successfully. Most of these people could require and would receive additional support if their job circumstances change.

Trends in Adult Day Services
Numbers of People by Type of Service
1988-1998



Average Monthly Wages Per-person by Type of Employment Service
1990-1997

(Each service type includes people with severe disabilities)



Reactions to the program

Parents and people with disabilities have three different sorts of assessments of the Family Grants program: matter-of-factness, deep satisfaction, and partial relief. These different assessments are based on different experiences, circumstances, and expectations.

Each of the people with disabilities we interviewed views their experience in a **matter-of-fact** way. A level of consultation, individualized planning and support, and control over service funds that some would see as an innovation, they take as just the way it is in the world of adult services. They expected that their families would work with and for them for a positive future. They have dreams for their future that reach well beyond their first or second job and they expect people to listen to these dreams seriously, even if they seem overly ambitious to the listener. They expected to face increasing responsibility for their own lives and welcome the signs of independence. They expected to work in a community setting. They expected service providers and their employers and co-workers to work with them to succeed at work.

The expectations that make the Family Grants program no big deal to its participants with disabilities are not an accident. Well over two hundred people with developmental disabilities have proceeded them into community jobs in the past ten years, pushing a local process of shifting expectations about supported employment since they were in 7th grade. Since they were in 9th grade, a growing number of employers have invested in people with disabilities, allowing them to move from places in supported employment agencies and remain successful at work. Several supported employment service providers have spent years improving their ability to develop jobs and support people in them.

One situation illustrates the impact of the county's history of interwoven policies on the workings of the Family Grants program. The person who moved most quickly to achieve his work objective did so through a combination of good timing and long term development. It was his good fortune to be in the planning process when SEH America, Inc. announced a job opening. He thought that the job, in maintenance, would suit his interests and he applied, was interviewed with several other disabled and non-disabled candidates, and hired. Since then,

he has changed jobs twice within SEH as his skills have developed and his supports have shifted. This is his accidental good timing. SEH America, Inc. is a highly desirable place to work and job openings are infrequent. That a job, with support internal to the company, was available at all is the product of years of local development work. The company's president was an early member of the county's business advisory council for supported employment and the company itself holds a contract from the county through which it pays consultants who help company supervisors and co-workers to train and support the people with developmental disabilities who work throughout the large silicon wafer factory. The person who benefited from the Family Grants program does not remember being a participant and only "sort of remembers" Lyn, the WISE staff member who helped him and his family with his plan.

Some parents are interested in the opportunity to participate actively in their son's or daughter's career development and report **deep satisfaction** with their involvement, even when achieving planned objectives takes longer than they expected or remains elusive. Their satisfaction seems to have at least seven sources, of varying importance to each person.

- They have confidence in their sons and daughters, recognizing both that they have an important contribution to make to their employers and co-workers and that they have significant growing up to do. They have confidence in themselves as positive actors in their son's or daughter's lives, with important resources to contribute to planning and problem solving as well as to getting the work done. (See "Everything in his life has changed" on page 19).
- They feel a real sense of obligation to remain positively involved in their son's or daughter's life. The experience of special education leaves them not with a sense of entitlement to demand services but with a realization that the quality of their son's or daughter's life depends in important ways on their continued involvement in discovering and advocating for opportunities. They see involvement in the program as an investment in increasing their son's or daughter's independence.
- They are strongly aligned with the principle of individual and family choice. So, they feel a responsibility to inform themselves about the workings of adult

service systems and the career opportunities that their community can make available. And, they feel obliged to act on what they find out. As graduation drew closer, they felt a strong sense that they were moving into uncharted territory. They have found the information available through the Family Grant's program relevant and useful. They appreciate that the project communicates information to allow them to make better decisions, not professional conclusions about the services their son or daughter needs. Participation in the project seems to them to offer an insider's view of the bigger picture of the adult service system and to bring them candid and knowledgeable reactions to their ideas from an expert who points out possible advantages and disadvantages without usurping responsibility.

- They believe that employment, with most support coming from employers and co-workers, makes sense for their son or daughter's future. They understand that people have to work together over time across workplace, family, and service provider boundaries to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- The process of person-centered employment planning makes sense to them and matches their understanding of best practice in services. They do not expect professionals to know best or to take over decision making. They see "a slot" in the existing system as likely to limit their son or daughter's potential far more than an individually focused process of developing a naturally supported job will do.
- They value making the best possible use of available service funds as carefully targeted investments. They like the idea of negotiating with service providers for exactly what is needed, and being able to renegotiate supports as the work unfolds. They see the program as upholding the principle of taking no more from public funds than is absolutely necessary to achieve a positive goal.
- They trust that the people who manage the County DD program will not abandon them. They believe that if money for long-term support is needed, County staff will work hard to help find it.

These sources of satisfaction are not accidental. The DD Program has invested for ten years in a variety of activities that involve parents and people with disabilities in strategic planning, organizing to define and pursue goals that will

improve their communities and the service system, advising on program development and program operations, training about state of the art service practices, and leadership development activities. Collaboration between county staff, supported employment providers, and several school systems has shaped the expectations that guide school based transition plans. Schools want to assure that students gain real work experience, and possibly a paid job, before graduation.

A small number of people and family members, whom we did not interview but heard about from other people, may experience the Family Grant program as a source of (at least short-term) relief. They are more likely to have been referred to the Family Grant program by the case manager than to have sought information and applied. The referral may have been stimulated by a judgement that the person and family experiences current difficulties that the program can help rather than by a sense that the family is interested in making a substantial investment in their son's or daughter's career. Whether this relief translates into longer-term satisfaction for these families remains to be seen.

What does the program offer?

The Family Grants program offers a way to carefully focus family and county resources on assisting young people to build their careers.

From the family's point of view

Instead of moving directly from school to a place in the adult service system, participant families choose to spend some time in an in-between state. Instead of staying in a job that is acceptable they have the option of working to expand their responsibilities or find a job that better fits their interests. Instead of settling for the first job that a provider steers them toward, they have the option to try other ways of job search and development. This in-between state, and the planning and money resources that support them in it, allows them to try things and see what results will show. It offers a way to negotiate and modify time limited service agreements that are as specific as people want to make them. Families can focus service system dollars on exactly what they think will help the most.

This flexibility comes at a cost.

- The opportunity to fill a slot in the system that offers more assurance of long-term funding moves a year or more into a future, where budgets are uncertain.
- Building up knowledge of the adult service system takes more time and effort when a family holds its options open than when it settles early on a provider.
- Some ideas work wonderfully; others prove ineffective. It can be hard to judge when to stop investing in something that doesn't work. One parent said, "I began to see a big meter with dollars ticking off it. By the time we had discovered several reasonable approaches that didn't turn out, the meter was getting pretty close to zero."
- Negotiation with service providers is, as one parent put it, "A game with uncertain rules". Another parent said, "The provider had a set price and I wasn't sure how much room there was for negotiation". Another parent said, "The provider was happy to take my phone calls and talk with me about my ideas, but the time I spent on the phone went on the bill".

As long as there are families able and willing to make the most of the uncertainties on the other side of the coin from flexibility and control, the Family Grants program will continue to offer direct benefits to a proportion of each year's graduates. How large that proportion will be in a given year depends partly on chance and partly on the effectiveness of the County-School collaboration in preparing families for leadership and young people with disabilities for employment.

From the County DD Program's point of view

This table identifies some of the contributions the Family Grants program could make to the County DD Program. It identifies each potential contribution and then assigns a subjective rating, based on incomplete information about a few of the small number of participants to date. These values and ratings are offered as a point of departure to encourage more knowledgeable people to substitute their own, better informed judgements.

Contribution	Realized to date	Long-term potential
Uphold systems value on choice for families and people with disabilities	++?	+++?
Uphold systems value on partnership with families and people with disabilities	+++?	+++?
Uphold systems value on employment and community inclusion	+++	+++
Save money	+?	++?
Manage the waiting list in a positive way.	++	++?
Stimulate innovation through family investment	+?	++?
Focus investment of county funds on individual needs	+++	+++

Promote choice. The Family Grants program clearly increases parental power at a key moment in their son's or daughter's life, and the person-centered employment planning process encourages a focus on the interest and preferences of the person with a disability. The parents and people with developmental disabilities we interviewed have identified only a few conflicts over the choice of job and support arrangements and the say they have resolved them satisfactorily. However, it is possible to imagine situations in which the program gives parents a level of control that their sons or daughters might not welcome. Such conflict situations would test and could strengthen the person-centered employment planning process if its facilitators can discover sufficiently powerful ways to surface and deal with them.

Uphold partnership and inclusive employment. The program is designed to promote partnership with people and families who have made up their minds about naturally supported employment. There is, however, some reason for concern that some families may be referred to the program rather than choosing to apply and going through a selection process that clarifies expectations on both sides before a family joins the program. This drift from the program's initial procedure could compromise the degree to which it exemplifies partnership, as well as involving the project with families and people for whom naturally supported employment may not be a settled issue.

Save money. So far the Family Grants program offers modest economies, but the numbers are too small and time is too short to know the extent of sustainable savings. Only one of the five people who have completed the program to date has spent the whole amount of county money available (\$4,500). Potentially more significantly for savings, three people currently foresee continuing to manage without county long-term support funds, while the fourth employed person will probably be seeking them. The level of need for long-term support funds is uncertain exactly because the Family Grants program encourages families to try their own approaches. For example, one family is having their son pay for his employment support from his paycheck. Their idea in doing this is twofold: they believe that he has a responsibility to contribute to his own support and they believe that paying for assistance necessary to meet his employer's job performance standards will strongly motivate him to consistently meet those standards with much less external coaching. It is too soon to tell how this idea will work, but it is certainly an experiment consistent with the program's principles.

Manage the waiting list. While some families said that the waiting list was their alternative to participation in the Family Grant program, the program's effectiveness as a mechanism for reducing the waiting list can't be assessed until the trends in use of Family Grants funds and need for long term support becomes clear. This in turn depends on the levels of need for support among upcoming graduates and the number of families each year who are ready to assume responsibility for a Family Grant.

Stimulate innovation. Two of the people we interviewed raised an important issue about the identity of the program. Their expectation, based on listening to presentations about Oregon's experience with a similar program, was that families would be more directly involved in job development and less involved with existing providers. They expected that the typical family in the program would be like the one participant family that did a great deal of the work of job development themselves, hiring an individual job coach from among the people they knew to supplement their own efforts in specific, time-limited ways under family direction. Noting that the other families who completed planning and all but perhaps one of the families involved in planning have contracted through the program (or will do so) for job development and job coaching from one of the county's existing vendors, they wonder if the program contributes enough to innovation or if the program might somehow discourage potential family initiative.

Considering these questions highlights the Family Grant's program's place in the history of the County's system of policies. A reasonably effective system frequently makes hiring a provider the most rational choice a family can make.

- Family effort to develop jobs and hire individuals as job coaches is a possibility in the Family Grants program. It is not an expectation.
- Collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation can extend the amount of money available over the time families participate in the program and thus increase the amount of carefully targeted service a family can buy from a VR approved vendor.
- Families trust that longer-term support will be available if they need it. There may be delays, but the DD Program has a very good track record with finding ways to assist young adults.
- There is a choice among providers who have a history of working with families and people who want jobs and people have the choice of moving to another provider if they are unsatisfied. Observers might ask if a particular family has found the best possible match or if a provider is doing as well as possible, but family assessments of providers range from satisfied to highly satisfied.

- One contractor, SEH of America, Inc., is also the participant's employer; taking a job there means having most support from supervisors and co-workers with back up from County and Vocational Rehabilitation funded staff who are sub-contractors to the company.
- Families do work hard toward high expectations. All of the parents we interviewed have been active throughout the process; all but one have decided to focus their energy on tasks that they think they can do better than a supported employment provider can. Moreover, employment is not their only concern. Two of the first five families were involved in developing Teammates, an individually tailored housing arrangement for their sons and six other people with disabilities, at the same time they had Family Grants.

Focus Investment. The Family Grants program is a powerful adjunct to the Choice Policy, which uses amendment of block contracts to allow County money to follow a person who decides to change providers. Families who have had the benefit of directing expenditure of County Program funds for a year or more to implement a well organized employment planning process can more likely focus County dollars where they will have the most benefit than block contracting can. The families involved in the program to date have been thoughtful stewards of the money, taking no more than they need and looking for the best value for the money they spend.

Opportunities for development

The Family Grant's Program can be known by its future. These are the opportunities for improvement people familiar with the program have identified to shape the program's development as it grows.

- Make the most of the knowledge and skills parents and people with disabilities have developed their through participation in the family grant program:
 - Involve parents and people with disabilities in informing prospective participants about what it takes to make the Family Grants program work
 - Create and support a role for family mentors. Both parents and people with disabilities could act as guides and consultants to others.

- Set up a study group including family members, providers, and case managers to learn more about Family Grants programs in King and Pierce Counties in Washington and in Oregon. Charge the study group with planning for possible improvements in the program. Ask them to consider the possibilities of encouraging more family investment in recruiting and employing job developers rather than agencies.
- Develop local capacity to guide families through the process of person-centered employment planning and implementation.
- Refine the person-centered employment planning process...
 - ... to encourage families and people with disabilities to convene a circle of support who will be available as employment circumstances change and who can increase their numbers as people meet new allies among providers or at work. Some people have already met people who can be a valuable resource in their development, not just in their success on the job; the opportunity to voluntarily commit to join a person’s circle would give such people a way for their voices to be heard.
 - ... to provide an even deeper foundation for career planning by making more room for people’s longer term dreams. These dreams may be poorly formed or hard to see the immediate practical ways to, but the person needs to know that there is a place where they are welcome to grow. For example, one person has had a long time interest in the law, another sees himself organizing a big company. Both of these ideas contain important clues for career development if they can be welcomed without a feeling that “something must be done”.
- Consider engaging families in the process before graduation by sponsoring young adults with disabilities, family members and providers to develop and deliver a series of training opportunities that would allow families and students with disabilities and their allies to make a set of three person-centered plans around these questions under a theme like “Working toward a good job”: “How do I get the most out of high school?” “How do I get the most out

of my last three years?” “How do I get the most out of my last year.”*

Encourage more schools to have people graduate with their class and then use their final three years of eligibility for special education to increase their employability.

- Work with Case Management to assure that all potential families have the opportunity to apply for the Family Grants program and that the program’s application process remains the basis for referral.
- Review the Family Grants program with interested providers. Develop a process to surface and problem solve around to minimize issues that they may experience as disincentives to serve families in the Family Grants program without compromising the program’s identity and values.
- Consider a long-range plan to greatly increase the number of people who have control of individual budgets.**

*The Pathfinders program, jointly sponsored by the NY Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and the New York City Public Schools, has valuable experience to share. Contact Fredda Rosen, Job Path 22 West 38th St, New York, NY.

** In addition to the resources available through the Robert Wood Johnson sponsored self-determination projects (see www.selfdetermination.org) contact Patty Cotton at The UNH Institute on Disability, The Concord Center, 10 Ferry St, Unity 14, Concord, NH 03301 for information on her work in supporting Area Agencies (which have a similar role to the County DD Program) to provide individual budgets to people with substantial disabilities and support them and their families in making the best use of them.

Letter to Families

Dear Applicant:

Enclosed you will find an application for the *FAMILY GRANTS* project. Please fill it out and return it to *Mary Strehlow*, DCS Developmental Disabilities Program by March 29, 1996. Applications will be reviewed and families notified by April 10, 1996. If you have questions or need help contact *Mary Strehlow* (360-699-2130), Clark County, or *Lyn McIntyre* (206-343-0881), Washington Initiative for Supported Employment.

Purpose:

The goal of this project is to support families to create jobs for their family member with a developmental disability. Assistance will be available in the following ways:

- Help with identifying possibilities and strategies, including an employment plan.
- Training and assistance in connecting with community and employment resources.
- One time cash assistance of up to \$4,500 to implement the employment plan. Funds could be used for supports and services such as employer development and training on the job.
- Assistance with developing resources and linkages with the necessary agencies to promote long term support in each employment situation.

Criteria:

In order to be eligible for this project a family must:

1. Have a son or daughter who is eligible for services from the State Division of Developmental Disabilities and has graduated from high school last year or will graduate this year (21 or older), and is not currently in a county-funded program.
2. Want paid employment in the community (a job).
3. Be interested and active in developing community links to find and maintain jobs for their family member.

Assistance will be provided in the form of direct support and training for the family and in the form of funds for expenses related to job search, training, and support. These funds are short term and must be spent within a year of acceptance. The grant funds:

- Cannot be used to sponsor permanent modifications to an employer's real estate.
- Cannot be placed in a personal savings account where interest is accrued.
- Cannot be used to duplicate or supplant existing available publicly funded support services.
- Cannot be used to pay tuition fees at a school or college.

These funds can be used to ensure successful community placement, training, and maintenance of a job for the family member.

Thank you.

THE FAMILY GRANTS PROCESS

- I. Submit application to Washington Initiative
- II. Application reviewed- in person meeting set
- III Initial meeting
 - Discuss application
 - Release of information, grievance procedures
 - Provide additional program materials
 - Discuss program design
- IV. Request sent to DDD for referral information (wise)
- V. Set meeting #2 (the family develops the team & organizes the plan)
 - Discuss organizing the team
 - Preparing for the planning meeting
- Vi. Family organizes team meeting / DVR meeting (WISE)
- VII. Person centered plan developed / DVR eligibility
- VIII Plan implementation
 - Selecting the job developer
 - Sharing the employment plan information
 - Contracting grant \$ for services
- IX. Family monitors employment plan
- X. Family attends group meetings

“Everything in his life has changed”

“Everything in his life has changed because of having this job,” Kay says of her son, Cody. Cody, who has Down syndrome, is 22 years old and has been working for over a year at the Vancouver Mall Retirement Center. He works part-time, assisting in the kitchen, setting and clearing tables, and serving residents. He recently moved into his own home—which he pays for largely from his earnings. His mother says that having a job benefits Cody in several ways. Not only does it give him an independent income to pay for his living expenses, but it has helped give him a sense of accomplishment and has allowed him to develop good relationships with a diverse group of people who live and work at the retirement center.

When Cody exited school in 1996, Kay and the school had already laid the groundwork for successful employment. Cody had had several job experiences while he was a student—experiences that Kay believes were important because they gave him the freedom to try things and to fail without jeopardizing a real job. Meanwhile, Kay had been talking to the Assistant Director of the retirement home where several relatives, including her mother, live.

The family, including Cody, was known to many of the staff. The Assistant Director, who had a niece and nephew with Down syndrome, was willing to give Cody a try at a job there when he graduated. So Kay lined up a teacher’s aide who had worked with Cody on his school job experiences, asking her to provide job coaching. Unfortunately, the Assistant Director left that position before Cody graduated, and the job was no longer waiting for him. Back to square one, Kay didn’t give up. She approached a new chef at the retirement home who also happened to have a relative with Down syndrome. The chef agreed to try Cody in the kitchen.

Using Family Grants money, Kay hired Cindy, the teacher’s aide. Cindy trained Cody. She also worked with his supervisor and coworkers to figure out how the job could be modified to better fit Cody’s abilities, and how best to train and work with him. Cindy stayed the first four weeks, providing constant

support and feedback to both Cody and the rest of the staff. Then she left and Cody's support was taken over by his coworkers.

Kay attributes his success in part to those coworkers. There are five or six who especially take an interest in Cody and want to see him succeed, she says. That group provides a stable, helpful core group—so that even if Cody's bosses change jobs, there's always someone around who's committed to his success. Not that Kay and Cody think this job will last forever. He's young, and will probably find other things he wants to do later on. Right now he's looking for a second part-time job in the area of electronics or radio: a long-time interest. On weekends, under his alias The Code-Man, Cody works as a disc jockey.

Asked what she'd tell other families about Family Grants, Kay says that it "allows you to develop jobs in a meaningful time frame –when your son or daughter is ready to work, rather than operating in a narrower window that the traditional system sometimes provides." "I tell other families, 'Get involved with this,'" she says. A family has to be proactive and willing to do the work; but she thinks a lot of families are. They just need the opportunity to try it, she says.