

Improving Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) Outcomes Across Illinois: The Role of SWTCIE and the Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research



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Today's presenters



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Agenda

- Introduction to SWTCIE Illinois and the Dignity in Pay Act
- Overview of SWTCIE implementation
- SWTCIE Client Success stories
- Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research Project overview





SWTCIE Illinois

From Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment for Illinoisans with Disabilities: An Innovative & Collaborative Project Partnership



SWTCIE Stories - Future Impact and Dignity in Pay



Dignity in Pay Act (DiP)

The Dignity in Pay Act requires the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD), and the Illinois Department of Labor to lead a responsible and gradual 5-year process to expand employment options for people with disabilities and phase out 14(c) subminimum wage authorizations in Illinois.

- Signed into law on December 12th, 2025
- Requires responsible and gradual five-year phase out of 14C/SMW workshops
- Eliminates permission for employers to pay workers with disabilities less than the minimum wage, starting on December 31, 2029
- WILL NOT close day programs or sheltered work, but does mandate at least minimum wage payment for work
- Prioritizes Person-Centered planning, especially for aging adults



What this means for Illinois



- All **65** applications for 14(c) certificates in Illinois will be phased out by **December 31st, 2029**
- Current 14(c) certificate holders will need to address systemic issues within their agencies to promote changes.
- Sustainability efforts will need to be made to ensure day-to-day operations are met.
- It will require A LOT of coordinated planning, execution, and changes to be successful.
- Addressing longstanding contracts with companies that are paying subminimum wage.
- Interagency collaboration – School/Transition Programs, DRS, CRP's, ISC's, Housing facilities, etc.

Statewide Sustainability Efforts

The Dignity in Pay Transition Fund

- DRS/DDD funded Grant program offered to current 14c holders
- Provides funding, technical assistance, training, and other supports, for up to 15 providers throughout fiscal years 2026 and 2027
- IIRER is creating a guidebook, webinars, and other training materials to assist agencies in transforming their business model to align with the phase out of 14c certificates

Employment & Economic Opportunities for People with Disabilities (EEOPD) Phase out plan

- Established by the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD) the EEOPD has developed a multi-year phase out plan to ensure a smooth transition away from SMW work
- Includes financial, policy, and system-level changes such as increased supported employment rates, transition grants for providers, data analytics, provider supports, policy recommendations, and ongoing review of rates and reimbursements.
- Supports successful employment by expanding training, working with private businesses, and improving access to benefits planning, assistive technology, transportation, and other needed supports.



SWTCIE Illinois Overview

- **Purpose:** to support innovative activities within Community Rehab Providers and the Division of Rehabilitation Services aimed at increasing Community Integrated Employment for individuals with disabilities who are currently engaged in subminimum wage work (SMW) or contemplating a SMW setting
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- 5-year demonstration project funded by U.S. Department of Education through the Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services
 - Illinois is one of 13 states where the SWTCIE Project is being implemented
 - 6 Community Rehab Providers in Illinois received SWTCIE funds
 - Administered and managed by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



Overview cont.

University of Illinois- Urbana-Champaign

- Program implementation, evaluation, and technical assistance

Division of Rehabilitation Services

- Dedicated DRS VR Counselor(s) working with each agency

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

- Training and technical assistance

14c Certificate Holders:

- The Workshop, Kreider Services, AID, CTF Illinois, Human Support Services, Centerstone

- SWTCIE agencies receive technical assistance from a dedicated **UIUC Community Research Specialist** along with two **VCU Consultants**
- SWTCIE agencies have at least two **Employment Specialists** providing community employment services to SWTCIE customers
- All SWTCIE staff have completed **Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE)** certification

Target SWTCIE Population

SWTCIE Participants are youth (up to age 24) or adults who are:

- currently employed at subminimum wage, **or**
- currently not working and have previously been employed at subminimum wage, **or**
- has not historically held competitive integrated employment, or whose competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability, **or**
- contemplating subminimum wage work, **and**
- eligible for IDHS-DRS vocational rehabilitation (Section 553.20 Basis for Eligibility), **and**
- meets the criteria for Most Significant or Very Significant Disability (Section 553.140 Criteria for Most Significant Disability, Very Significant Disability...)

SWTCIE Illinois Demonstration Project Goals

- **Identify strategies to expand CIE opportunities** for Illinoisans with disabilities currently employed in SMW workshop settings
- **Develop new employment models** for youth and adults with disabilities to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)
- **Identify policy and programming gaps** that affect Illinoisians with disabilities from transitioning into CIE
- **Develop evidence-based practices and share those practices** with other entities holding 14(c) certificates, State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, local rehabilitation providers, State and local workforce agencies, and regional and local employers.
- **Create and adopt an innovative business model** that focuses on CIE and eliminates the use of the 14(c) certificate and increase the use of VR Contracts.



Build strong community partnerships to better support people with disabilities and their families.

Address barriers that make accessing competitive community jobs difficult.

Provide services that help people prepare for, find, and keep community employment.

Ensure each person has needed wraparound supports like transportation, benefits help, and job coaching.

Help agencies move away from subminimum wages with clear community-employment business models.



Community Research Specialists: Notes from the Field

Challenges:

- Working with agency treatment teams
- Transportation
- Shifting community and employer perspectives
- Educating parents and guardians on CIE
- Carving out Customized Employment opportunities
- Navigating clients limited exposure to employment options

What has worked:

- Building strong relationship with local DRS office, client's family, support system
- Support from VCU
- On going professional development for Employment Specialists
- Offering Benefits Planning to all participants
- Not rushing the client Discovery process or Business Development process

Project Totals

10/1/2023- 12/31/25

- 169 individuals engaged in SWTCIE Services
- 67 individuals previously in SMW setting
- 77 individuals have obtained CIE

Among the 14 states that received SWTCIE funding, Illinois is emerging as a national leader!



SWTCIE Stories – Robert



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IIRER Projects

Illinois Pathways to Partnerships

Apprenticeship Project

Illinois VR Training Project



Illinois Pathways to Partnerships Project (IP2P)

Illinois Pathways to Partnerships (IPPP) is an innovative project aimed to improve transition outcomes, competitive integrated employment (CIE) and independent living outcomes for students with disabilities age 10-24 across Illinois by seamlessly partnering Vocational Rehabilitation, Centers for Independent Living (CIL), and school district.

- Delivers an innovative Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) model including supports for both students and families
- Builds a comprehensive system of resources, training, technical assistance, and coordinated supports
- Partnerships include IDHS-DRS, ISBE, local educational agencies, and Centers for Independent Living
- Focuses on three major domains:
 - Pre-ETS to competitive integrated employment (CIE) or postsecondary education (PSE)
 - Independent living
 - Professional development



IIRER Training Project

IIRER Training supports local, state, national, and international stakeholders, including state and federal agencies, independent organizations, and a wide range of projects, initiatives, and partnerships.

Training aims to deliver high-impact, evidence-based educational programs focused on the medical and psychosocial aspects of disability and chronic health conditions, vocational rehabilitation practices, health equity and promotion, and community integration.

- Live and recorded webinars
- In-person symposiums and conferences
- Print products (e.g., Illinois voices, factsheet, briefs, reports)
- Certification of Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and Certification for Vocational Evaluators (CVE)
Continued Education (CE) Provider
- Illinois Social Work CE provider
- Illinois Educator PDH provider

Apprenticeship Project

IIRER has been working to expand apprenticeship opportunities, accessibility, and outcomes for young people with disabilities across the state of Illinois and nationwide.

Of roughly 27,000 registered apprenticeship programs and over half a million active apprentices nationally, a mere 1% identify as having a disability

- Formally partnered with 4 state VR agencies to develop and provide intensive technical assistance on apprenticeships.
- Facilitated several 12-month national workgroups with state VR agencies/disability service providers centered around increasing apprenticeship opportunities for PWD.
- Developed a comprehensive Apprenticeship Toolkit with practical significance for work and disability stakeholders.
- Under these initiatives we have developed 14 webinars and presentations; 11 products, factsheets, or manuals; one journal article; and have attended 12 conferences across 4 states.

Helpful Links

[Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research](#)

[SWTCIE Illinois](#)

[SWTCIE Illinois YouTube](#)

[Subscribe to SWTCIE Connect Newsletter](#)

[Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)

[EEOPD Task Force Multi-Year Plan](#)





Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research

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