

# PROMISING PRACTICES



## Finding a silver lining in dark economic clouds

*By Thea Strong, The Arc of Monmouth, Inc.*

The employment services department at [The Arc of Monmouth](#) strives to use its funding dollars wisely -- primarily for direct support of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Tinton Falls, New Jersey, area. The country's economic downturn required finding new ways to maintain a high level of employment services in a climate of declining funding.

### **A step five years ago raised efficiency**

In 2006, The Arc's employment services department reported gains in productivity after purchasing a database specifically designed for maintaining required data on persons in supported employment. The database streamlined recording and reviewing data and statistics and alleviated the time-consuming process of manually billing.

Employment specialists enter information into the database on the supports provided to consumers as frequently as possible. Supervisors can access and review the information as needed. If a substitute staff member is needed, the task analysis for the job and the latest progress notes are instantly available, allowing for a seamless transfer of job coaching.

The database was a great improvement and saved employment specialists, managers, and administrative staff many hours of manual labor each month. This time saving allows staff to spend more time supporting people in jobs and assisting them to refine their skills.

### **Additional budget-trimming steps became necessary**

As funding became an increasing concern over the past five years, additional improvements in procedures were needed to become more

Brought to you by the ECS  
customer service unit at

**carf**

Volume 6, Issue 5  
July 2011

---

### **About the ECS Promising Practices series**

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

Find current and past issues of ECS Promising Practices at [www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices](http://www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices). Issues are categorized by topic -- Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

efficient. The Arc needed to find innovative ways to cut costs while maintaining its quality of services for the persons it served.

Brainstorming in the employment services department resulted in implementing many staff members' excellent suggestions, including:

- Moving to less costly office space to stretch the budget.
- Using savings from the office relocation to purchase laptop computers and modems for each employment specialist.
- The Arc's information technology manager's creation of a virtual private network (VPN) for staff members to securely access the database from external locations, including work sites where job coaching was being provided. Staff members formerly recorded progress notes by hand when meeting consumers at their jobs and then traveled to an office to re-enter the information into a computer. Now, laptops and a VPN enable them to enter the notes directly when they are on site.
- Offering intensive training to help staff members effectively use the database and their laptops.
- Providing larger keyboards and built-in technical support and other accommodations for staff, as needed.
- Increasing supervisory support at the work sites, which is especially valuable for newly trained employment specialists.
- Initiating biweekly staff meetings to share information and to maintain team spirit and support.
- Using Google Calendar to record staff members' schedules and track the location of employment specialists each day.

The results of these efficiency efforts exceeded staff members' expectations. Travel costs were cut substantially because staff members report to the consumers' work site rather than to an office, thereby increasing valuable hours to provide services. Supported employees and their families have expressed appreciation for the increased presence of employment specialists at the work site.

Accuracy has increased since services are documented immediately via laptops. The documentation is accessed and monitored by supervisors for accountability and accuracy and is available to other qualified support staff, saving additional time and effort. Reports can be easily prepared and emailed to funding sources and The Arc's accounting department.

The need for job coaching during the tightening labor market is more critical than ever. The presence of employment services staff on the job site allows for increased support and helps to prepare the consumer for new challenges as jobs change -- often making the difference in holding a job or losing it.

Staff members initially regretted the limited opportunity for face-to-face interactions with each other, but, as they have become more adept

at using their computers, they have found new ways to stay in touch and share information. Email and voicemail help to keep staff members updated between biweekly meetings and training sessions.

The Arc of Monmouth employment services team is stronger than ever, and consumers are receiving the support they need and deserve. The organization's most recent [CARE](#) survey report recognized The Arc's exemplary service practices related to its job coaching and outcomes management system.

*Below: The Arc of Monmouth job coach Regina Averyanova meets with consumer Mike Morton at Mike's work site.*



---

For more information, contact Thea Strong, director of employment services, The Arc of Monmouth, at (732) 493-1919 or [tstrong@arcofmonmouth.org](mailto:tstrong@arcofmonmouth.org). The organization's website is at [www.arcofmonmouth.org](http://www.arcofmonmouth.org).

