

RESEARCH SUMMARY SHEET

Title: Personal Assistance Cooperatives: Workforce models

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Research Partner: National Center on Workforce and Disability for Adults (NCWD-Adult)

Objective(s):

The study's purpose is to provide the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) with policy recommendations related to personal assistance services (PAS) cooperatives. Cooperatives have the potential to be a model of service delivery in terms of cost, quality of assistance, and worker-consumer cooperation.

Research Methods

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with people who are knowledgeable about worker-controlled PAS co-ops, consumer-controlled PAS co-ops, and models that work for the benefit of both workers and consumers. Review of existing literature on PAS cooperatives.

Key Findings

A cooperative is an "organization that is owned and controlled by the people who use its products, supplies and/or services" (International Cooperative Alliance, 2006). Co-ops have both a social and an economic mandate, existing to improve the lives of workers as well as compete cost-effectively in the marketplace. Although cooperatives are a well-established model with a long history of success, worker co-ops to provide PAS are a relatively newer phenomena that began in the 1980's. Models of worker-run cooperatives include: the job training model, the organizing model of the independent caregiver cooperative, and the cooperative conversion model. Worker-run co-ops have faced many challenges, primarily related to funding, but there are existing successful examples in each category of worker coops. The job training model is designed to train low-income people, often recipients of public assistance, to become home health aides and worker-owners in the coops. The organizing model focuses on organizing people who are already working as independent caregivers into a self-governing cooperative. The conversion model is when existing businesses or non-profits transform their organizational structures into cooperatives. One other potentially useful finding is the existence of worker-consumer run coops where both workers and PAS consumers are members of the coop, thus ensuring voices from both sides.

Recommendations/Policy Implications

PAS cooperatives are a way to organize services to benefit both workers who provide PAS, and consumers who use the services. They may control costs, improve quality of service, and provide workers with increased income and benefits.

Resources Available (reports, surveys, articles, tables, maps, videos, popular education materials, etc.)

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Sutherland, K., & Beachy, T. (2004, March). *Innovative co-ops in the social services sector: A research study to benefit people with developmental disabilities and mental illness*. Cooperative Secretariat, Government of Canada. Retrieved November 14, 2006 from, http://www.coop.gc.ca/pub/pdf/socserv-servsoc_e.pdf

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Dates of Research

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