

Somerset Workshop Closed!



On a beautiful, mid-summer afternoon, things were fairly quiet in the Somerset Community Services (SCS) Day Program building last week. That's because the once bustling sheltered workshop located in the building has now officially closed. Somerset has been engaged in organizational transformation for several years, and this spring officially stopped utilizing their 14c certificate which allowed the organization to pay people with disabilities less than minimum wage to complete work from various contracts.

Over the last 6 months, Somerset was one of 6 DDA employment provider organizations that received intensive technical assistance through the Office of Disability Employment's (ODEP) Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program (EFSLMP). EFSLMP Subject Matter Expert, Rick McAllister, spent some time with the organization in person, as well remotely, to support their continued focused on increasing competitive employment and community engagement outcomes for people they support. Much of this TA focused on employer engagement and how to build relationships that can lead to employment.

Sandy Adkins, Somerset Executive Director, along with his leadership and employment teams have been working on redesigning services to focus more on the building of community connections and include things like community-based work training, volunteerism and competitive employment. When asked about their transformation, Sandy had this to say: "I am totally impressed with the job the SCS staff has done in transitioning to allow us to close our Sheltered Workshop. It has taken a real commitment to Employment First. I'm having a really hard time getting used to not seeing most of our consumers during the day. I miss them coming to my office every day."

Sandy admits that this transformation has not been easy, but they remain committed to Employment First principles and supporting people in their region.