



Barriers to Employment: A Family Perspective

As parents and guardians begin to discuss competitive integrated employment with their family members with a disability, they are forced to confront a whole host of issues and concerns. This fact sheet on competitive integrated employment addresses some of the concerns that family members may have and provides answers to address these concerns. Please visit the Illinois Department of Human Services at www.dhs.state.il.us for more information on employment services for individuals with disabilities. On this website, you can also get more specific information on Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Illinois, a new program serving individuals in subminimum wage positions who are interested in competitive integrated employment.

Question: How do you know if someone is ready to work in the community?

Answer: If the individual has expressed or indicated an interest in work then they may be ready for competitive integrated employment. A key aspect to supporting individuals with disabilities in competitive employment is finding a job that matches their interests and skills. Using this approach, a representative (usually referred to as an employment specialist) works closely with the job seeker to negotiate a specific position that uses their talents to meet the needs of a business. The goal is not just to locate any job, but a job that is aligned with the individuals' preferences and abilities. If the individual appears to be interested in work, then it may be time to take the next step and investigate competitive integrated employment.

Question: What is competitive integrated employment and where are these services located?

Answer: If the individual has a disability, employment services are funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services: Rehabilitation Services (IDHS: Rehabilitation Services). A person with a disability must apply for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services, be found eligible, and develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with a VR counselor. The VR counselor would authorize payment for an agency, sometimes referred to as a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP), to provide services. If an individual is not connected to a VR counselor, then the first step is to contact the VR agency for more information. Contact information is located at the end of this fact sheet.

Question: What happens when the individual with a disability does not have the skills to meet the demands of a job in the workforce and needs training?

Answer: People with significant disabilities may not transfer skills learned in one environment to another, which may indicate to some that they can't work. One of the reasons it is important to provide training in the environment where the skill will be used is because it is difficult to

simulate the features of a job in a setting that does not have coworkers or the demands of a real job. For instance, a job seeker may be in a training program to learn how to work in an office. The participants in the program take turns completing tasks such as sorting mail, delivering messages, folding letters and stuffing envelopes. However, procedures change from business to business. The way that one office prepares and delivers mail can be very different from another. The time spent learning the tasks in the training program would be better spent learning the job duties after the individual is employed. In other words, the new employee learns on the job! It is also important to consider if the skill being taught in the training program represents an employment task that the individual enjoys. Sometimes, training programs are not individualized to what each person wants to do. Instead the training tries to select activities that may represent potential jobs in the future. A person might learn how to do these tasks but never use them because they don't match job openings available in the community.

Question: How is safety addressed when new employees are on a job site?

Answer: It is only natural for families to be concerned about their sons or daughter's welfare. Looking for a place to work also includes making sure the person is "safe." First, "safe" needs to be defined in relationship to the job seeker's individual support needs. For example, a person who has a history of walking out of any door at home, school, or a day program may have a very different safety concern than the person who needs skill training. In some instances, a person may need to have extra training and support from a coworker. Another person might need a more structured situation where the work area is not next to an exit door. Safety concerns will be taken into consideration when choosing a good job match. For example, part of the accommodation discussion might include arranging for some additional supervision such as a job where the new employee works alongside a coworker who is aware of the support need. Once again, an employment specialist works closely with an employer to negotiate a job that maximizes the new employee's abilities and provides the workplace supports necessary for success.

Question: How do individuals with no work experience or really any exposure to the workforce learn skills on a job?

Answer: An employment specialist would discuss the on-the-job training process with the employer, clearly identifying that they will be onsite to provide instruction until the new employee learns the job. For example, sometimes a job applicant with a disability will need more skills training than the employer is able to provide. In such a case, the employment specialist will go to work with the individual and provide additional on-the-job training. Or perhaps, the person may need a modification in a company's policy that would allow him / her to work a flexible schedule. Workplace supports vary from individual to individual and are negotiated specifically to meet the needs of the new hire.

Question: How are jobs identified for individuals with no work histories?

Answer: A very important feature of the employment process is to spend time with the job seeker who wants to work. An employment specialist will spend time getting to know the job seeker, their family members, and other people who are important to their life. Generally, the first recommended step is to visit the individual's home to talk about, and observe, what the

person likes to do around the house and in their free time. In addition, an employment specialist will spend time in the community with the job seeker doing familiar activities, talking with family members, meeting with friends who know the job seeker, and so forth. This time will be spent discovering the job seekers interests, abilities, and support needs.

There still may be uncertainty about what the job seeker might like to do and the skills that they would bring to a job. If this happens, several types of jobs will be identified that seem to match the job seeker's expressed work interests. The employment specialist may ask the family if they know employers in their network that match the job seeker's employment goals. Then, the job seeker can tour these types of businesses to observe as well as "shadow" a coworker. During a work experience, the individual will have the opportunity to observe and sometimes try different job duties to more specifically identify their work preferences and interests. This information will be used to support a job match.

Question: How is transportation arranged? Is there a door-to-door service?

Answer: A critical aspect to competitive integrated employment will be finding work opportunities at locations where transportation will not present a barrier. Every situation is different. For example, some people may travel to work using public transportation, while others, ride with co-workers, take specialized transportation services, or walk. Today, some individuals with disabilities are using Uber or Lyft just like anyone else who needs transportation services.

Part of getting to know the job seeker will be exploring various transportation options. This information is vital to the strategic plan for securing a job since it influences scheduling requirements and the work location. For instance, some job seekers may have access to the public bus system but may not be able to ride the bus alone. In this case, a transportation trainer can teach the new employee how to get to and from the job on the bus. Or, another option might be that the place of business is on a friend's route to and from work. This could become part of the employment negotiation process. For example, employment negotiations may center around a specific work schedule that would allow the person to work at times that matches the friend's daily commute times.

If the individual and family are not comfortable with these options, staff can determine if there is a specialized transportation service in the community that can offer door-to-door service. Or, perhaps a college student or senior citizen would like to earn extra money providing transportation. It is important that the support needs of the individual are met so that everyone feels comfortable. The individual will not be left alone until their skills to get to and from work independently have been demonstrated.

Question: How will the cost of transportation impact the new employee's paycheck?

Answer: All employees would be making at least minimum wage or more based on what other workers earn who are performing similar job duties. The amount would be negotiated with the employer at the time of hire and again during the course of employment for pay raises. In addition, if the employee is receiving social security benefits the beneficiary may be able to claim an Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) for the cost of transportation. This is a

work incentive designed to assist people with disabilities in paying for expenses that are needed to work. Specialized transportation is one such expense. Basically, a person can deduct the cost of services and items needed to work and reduce the amount of countable income. When Social Security calculates how much a person will receive in their monthly check, an IRWE allows the beneficiary to keep more money than if there were no work expenses. While all of the cost of transportation may not be covered through the work incentive, the individual should have more money available than if not working.

Question: Will the job seeker lose Social Security benefits and Medicaid if they get a job? Medicaid is critical to many individuals for health care coverage.

Answer: It is very important to become informed! A Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) or sometimes referred to as a benefits planner or specialist can explain the basics of how work will impact and individual's monthly benefits check. It will also be important to get specific information on Social Security work incentives. These incentives were developed to encourage Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries to become self-sufficient. The IRWE is just one of the work incentives that can help. Others include the Earned Income Exclusion, PASS (Plan for Achieving Self Support), and Section 1619 (a) and (b).

Under Special SSI Payments for People Who Work: Section 1619 (a) and 1619 (b), a worker can continue to receive Medicaid. Eligibility continues as long as the beneficiary meets the basic eligibility requirements and the income and resources tests. Under 1619 (b), Medicaid coverage continues even when earnings become too high to receive an SSI payment, but there are threshold levels within each state. Some states have eligibility rules for Medicaid that differ from SSA's. This is information that you will need to discuss with a CWIC to find out exactly how work will impact your son's / daughter's benefits. However, he / she can always earn more money working than by just receiving benefits alone. If you still feel unsure after meeting with a representative, talk to other family members who have adult children with disabilities who are working in the community. You can download a booklet produced by the Social Security Administration, *The Redbook*, which provides more information on how work can impact benefits at <https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/>.

Question: Will work interfere with friendships at the day activity program?

Answer: If the opportunity to make friends is important, then this along with other key information would be taken into consideration during negotiations with employers. Every workplace culture is different. For instance, some are friendly and others are not. To understand the workplace culture, the employment specialist representing the job seeker will look for signs that the workplace is friendly and supportive.

Developing a good fit between a person and the social characteristics of a workplace is as important as learning how to perform a job. Most people with disabilities report making new friends at work and an overall, satisfaction with employment. An employment specialist can help provide support to the job seeker when first establishing relationships with coworkers. Social activities that are available to other employees would also be available to the new employee.

Going to work also does not mean that the individual has to give up friends from past agencies. Working should expand social opportunities and not limit them.

Question: What happened if an individual loses their job? Is there an opportunity to go back to the workshop or day activity program?

Answer: Negotiating a good job match will prevent this from happening. Rest assured that staff will work hard to solve any problems that come up during employment and to address any support needs that could lead to job loss. This includes re-negotiations with the employer, if necessary, to further customize the job. But, of course people still lose jobs. If this occurs, staff will work with the individual to find a new job in the community. A new position will be negotiated based on what is learned in the first job regarding interests, work skills, and support needs. Remember, employment specialists are always willing to talk with families whenever there is a question or concern.

Resources

Social Security Redbook

A copy of the Social Security Redbook can be downloaded from the Social Security Administration's website <https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/>. The Redbook provides information on how work can impact benefits.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Each state has a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency that assists individuals with disabilities achieve their employment goals. A list of state and US territory contacts can be found at the following link: <http://www.askearn.org/state-vocational-rehabilitation-agencies/>

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program

The WIPA program enables Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities to make a successful transition to work. Each WIPA project has Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWIC) who will provide in-depth counseling about benefits and the effect of work on those benefits. Learn more at <https://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPA.html> and at: <https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/>

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