



What Is Supported Employment?

All people, regardless of their ability, have the right to work. One way they may find and maintain a job is called supported employment. A job coach or supported employment specialist works closely with the individual/family to seek employment, always taking into consideration the interests, abilities, and the type of environment the person chooses to work in. When the desired employment is obtained, the job coach will be available to provide on the job support. These supports can be intensive on the job training, supervision, adapted/assistive technology, personal care attendance, transportation, or any other type of support that allows the employee to maintain employment.

Supported employment services may be required for the duration of an employee's employment. It may be full time 1:1 support, or it may be as simple as checking in occasionally to provide additional training or to see how things are progressing. Supported employment services are as individualized and unique as the employee.

Co-workers may provide natural supports to the individual as they begin to understand what kind of support is needed and as they develop a relationship based on friendship and respect. When fellow employees provide support, a job coach may not be needed as often.

Supported Employment options and solutions are growing rapidly. It is becoming a common practice as individuals with disabilities become more accepted and desired employees in all businesses and industries in our community.

Who Is Eligible For Supported Employment Services?

Any individual with a disability who has a desire to work is eligible for supported employment services if they need support to find and maintain a job. There may be a fee for these services. The agency that the individual will need to contact about obtaining supported employment services may also have a waiting list or eligibility requirements.

Who Should I Contact For Supported Employment Services?

The Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) may be the first place to look for employment supports. If your child is still in high school the PET Team should make a referral to VR before or no later than the child's 14th birthday. Referrals can be made at any age, but VR may have waiting lists and the sooner they receive the referral, the better.

How Do I Pay For Services?

Some ways to pay for job coach services may include writing a Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS Plan) or getting Impairment Related Work Expenses (IWRE) in conjunction with your SSI benefits. There are many ways to write a PASS Plan or claim an IWRE to pay for job coach support while maintaining Medicaid benefits at the same time. Help can be obtained in writing a PASS Plan from VR, Behavioral & Developmental Services, a job coach, or contracting with a private supported employment agency or benefit specialist.

A very important but often overlooked resource for job supports is a volunteer, a friend, or a family member. You may have in your circle of friends or your family a person who can help your child find a job and provide on the job support on a continuous basis or while other means of supported employment are explored.

What Happens If The Job Doesn't Work Out?

If an individual who is receiving Supported Employment services should lose their job through layoff or in some cases being fired, the following people should be contacted:

1. The local Employment Security Office should be contacted to ask about eligibility for unemployment benefits.
2. The Social Security Administration should be contacted if the individual is eligible for benefits so that the benefits can be adjusted accordingly.
3. The job coach or agency that is providing job support services should be contacted so that they can meet to help decide what the next steps toward seeking new employment are going to be. Some important questions will need to be asked: Was the support sufficient? Did the individual enjoy the job? Was the individual fired justly? Was transportation a problem? If lack of training or inexperience were factors, it may be necessary to look into other training options, which a job coach can help with. If the worker was laid off because of lack of work or other factors beyond their control, find out how long the layoff will last. If it is short term, it may be possible to wait. If it is permanent, the job search should begin again.

The most important thing to try to remember is to encourage the individual not to be too easily discouraged. It may not be possible to find a perfect match the first time. If the job was lost because of work habits, they can be changed. The process will be a learning experience that helps individuals look at their skills and learn ways to improve them. It can also be an opportunity to look at what the individual has experienced and what other things interest them that they might like to pursue.

For more information on this or other topics related to the needs of children with disabilities, call or write Maine Parent Federation, P.O. Box 2067, Augusta, Maine 04338, 1-800-870-7746 (In-State Only) 207-623-2144 or email MPF at parentconnect@mpf.org.

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