

Employment

The Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council supports the views and position of The Arc of the United States as our position on employment for people with disabilities

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) can work in the community with people without disabilities and earn good wages. They should be given information and supported to make choices about their work and careers. They should also have support to find and be successful working in the community.

Issue

Most people with I/DD have been unemployed or underemployed even when they can, want to, and are ready to work in the community.

- “Unemployed” means they do not have a job.
- “Underemployed” means they are working less than they want or their job does not make good use of their skills and abilities.

Many people with I/DD have been placed in “prevocational” programs and “disability-only” workshops where they are paid below minimum wage and have little chance to move into jobs working with people without disabilities.

- “Pre-vocational” programs are programs for people with disabilities where they learn skills to help them get and keep a job. They are paid very little or not at all.
- “Minimum wage” is the lowest amount the law says an employer can pay people.

People with disabilities often leave school with reading, writing and math skills/abilities below a 12th grade level. They get little:

- Job experience in the community.
- Planning that helps them move from school to work, job training, or college.

Agencies that work with adults have had a hard time helping people get jobs. A big problem is that their staff usually do not have good training about the best ways to find people jobs and support them in their jobs. When employed, few people with I/DD have opportunities to:

- Learn more responsibilities and make more money,
- Try new things and change jobs, or
- Retire when they are older.

Things that get in the way of people with I/DD getting jobs and doing work they like include:

- Employers, coworkers, and others have low expectations about people with I/DD. This means they do not think they can work or do a good job.
- People with benefits like Social Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid lose their benefits if they make or save too much money. Many people need these benefits even if they work. The limits are so low that people end up not working, working less hours than they want, or making little money.
- The way services are paid for does not work well. Often:
 - Agencies are paid for each hour of service they provide but they should be paid for outcomes, like people getting jobs.
 - Rules do not always make it possible for agencies to get money from different places so they can better meet people's needs.
- There are not enough transportation options or supports like assistive technology. Assistive technology is equipment and tools that help people be more independent.

Position

People with I/DD should have the supports they need from people in their lives and agencies to help them find and keep community jobs. They should have:

- Jobs based on what they like, their interests, and strengths.
- Jobs where they work with people with and without disabilities, receive the same wages (pay), and are treated fairly.
- The choice to go to college or have job training after high school to learn skills needed for better jobs.
- Ongoing planning to help them make changes they want at work so they learn new things, have more responsibility if they want it, and make more money.
- Fair pay and benefits. Benefits are things like health insurance and paid time off.
- Opportunities to be self-employed (be their own boss) and own a business.
- Opportunities to employ people with and without disabilities if they own small businesses.
- Chances to try new things over time and retire when they get older.
- Opportunities to work, make more money, and save without losing benefits they need like SSI and Medicaid.

Best Practices

“Best practices” are the smartest, best ways of doing things. They help get the best results.

Employment supports and services should use best practices, including:

- Figuring out what people’s skills and interests (likes) are.
- Working with employers to meet their needs and the needs of people with I/DD.
- Matching people with jobs they have the skills for. and employer needs,
- Providing ongoing job supports that are based on each person’s needs.
- Setting up job accommodations. Job accommodations are

changes made at work to help someone do their job better.

- Helping people be a part of the team at work.
- Helping people build social skills they need at work. Social skills are the skills we use to communicate and get along with other people.
- Setting up other services like transportation.
- Training, including driver's education if the person wants to drive. This will help them find jobs and increase their independence.

People with I/DD must have training and information about how to get the supports they need to find and keep jobs.

School-to-Work Transition

- Transition planning should start early. Transition planning means making a plan for changes that happen when we move from one big part of life to another. Like moving from school to work.
- Transition activities should help young people learn about and try different jobs in the community so they can decide which ones they like.
- Transition activities should include:
 - Finding out what students are interested in for their future careers.
 - Giving people a chance to learn about and experience college, job training, and different kinds of jobs.
 - Training people how to look for jobs and teaching them work skills.
 - Helping people get experience in different paid and unpaid jobs. Transition activities should involve more than just unpaid internships at specific places in the community.
- Students should leave high school with:
 - Opportunities to go to college or job training, and

- A job that is right for them, or a plan for finding one.

Programs

Employment programs paid for by the government should help people with I/DD find jobs with people without disabilities before considering other options in the community. Those jobs should pay people with I/DD the same as people without disabilities and have the same benefits. Public policy (government laws, rules, and decisions) should encourage employers to hire people with I/DD.

Employment programs paid for by the government should also:

- Be open to all people with I/DD who want to work, no matter what their disability is or how it affects their life.
- Help people to make choices that are right for them by giving them easy-to-understand information and opportunities to check out different jobs in the community.
- Provide enough money to support people to work in the community. Let providers use money from different places to provide the best services possible.
- End programs that get “sub-minimum wage certificates” (special papers) that allow them to pay people less than minimum wage. To make this possible, make changes and set up support to help more people with I/DD get jobs in the community where people without disabilities work. Put in place rules and plans (safeguards) to make sure nothing bad happens to people with I/DD when these changes happen. Keep track of progress and share results.

Information taken from the Joint Statement with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD).

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