

Consumer Services – Supported Employment

The Rehabilitation Act amendments of 1986 defines Supported Employment as “Competitive work in an integrated work setting for individuals with the most severe disabilities; for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred; or for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a severe disability; and who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need intensive supported employment services or extended services in order to perform such work.”

“Competitive work” refers to employment for wages consistent with earnings to persons with no apparent disabilities with similar job duties. “Integrated work” refers to a setting in which the Supported Employment consumer has routine opportunities to interact with employees and/or customers with no apparent disabilities, assuming that such interaction is inherent within the context of the job. An individual with the “most severe disability” refers to a person who meets the order of selection criteria of the state vocational rehabilitation and/or Medicaid eligibility for supported employment. “Extended services” refers to individualized follow-along up to the duration of employment.

Supported Employment is a “work-first” strategy which has proven successful for many individuals with severe disabilities. This is an emphasis on prompt and effective job matching, with the majority of support directed after job placement. The process typically includes: the development of a written plan of service; individual-specific pre-employment activities; job matching and placement; job coaching; and follow-along support for a defined or indefinite period. The service mix requires a collaborative approach among - at minimum - the service agency, consumer, and sponsoring organization.

Typically supported employment involves intensive job coaching and could include 100% on-site intervention for an extended period of time. Historically the sponsorship of supported employment has influenced this intervention. For example, the transfer of financial responsibility from the state vocational rehabilitation to the state Medicaid administrator has often established 90 days on the job as the period of stabilization, and the beginning of reduced intervention. It should be noted that some individuals may need indefinite intensive support. These circumstances require proper authorization including - but not limited to - the sponsor and the employer. The analysis for ongoing intensive support should include the feasibility, cost effectiveness and actual delivery process. Once approved, this support might continue to be provided by the supported employment provider, but could likewise involve another third party or a designated employee of the consumer’s employer.

Follow-along support is best provided as monthly proactive contacts with the consumer as well as the employer to ensure that the employment relationship continues to be successful. In some cases, supported employment providers might not interact directly with employers if this on-site intervention would contribute to stigmatizing or otherwise attracting unnecessary attention to an individual’s disability. Discretion is essential in all cases, as support should not detract from the consumer’s job success and community integration.