

## **Workshop #7: Workplace Pathways to Employment (resources to assist you with your employment)**

There are various agencies and organizations that can help with your employment search. As we consider these various “pathways to employment,” it’s important make the point that not all people with disabilities are the same. In other words, a particular disability employment program may not be set-up to serve all types of disabilities. Where this may appear to be the case, please consider digging deeper into them before giving-up.

For example, some post-secondary education programs offer courses for nontraditional students. Some have begun offering courses for students with disabilities who have never been accommodated before in post-secondary schools (community colleges and four year colleges). See:

<https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>

Another possibility adjustment might be something called “supported employment” which offers a personal job coach who assists an individual with a disability with the learning of a specific job. Here is more information on supported employment: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/rsasupemp/index.html>

And, there is a technique called “customized employment.” This is the adaptation of a specific job in a way agreeable to an employer which then makes the employment of a specific person with a disability possible. Here’s more information on “customized employment”:

<http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment>

So, if any of the local disability employment programs which are listed below seem not suitable to your needs, think about how these programs might use the strategies above to better serve you.

### **Workshop Topics**

1. Transition Programs
2. Post-secondary Education
3. Career Fairs
4. Internships
5. State Department of Rehabilitation
6. Other Community Based Programs

In addition to the discussion notes listed below, more content on each these topics can be found in “Part II: Workplace Pathways to Employment” of the *Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment* book available at <https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/>.

## Discussion Notes

### 1.) Transition Programs

At the high school or secondary school level, there are educational staff members employed who specialize in transition planning for students with disabilities. This purpose of these teachers or staff is to assist these students with their transitional planning from school to a job and the workplace. Transition services promote movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported and customized employment) continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation.

Typical services can:

- Assist families, parents, and students to access transition services
- Identify, establish, and maintain linkages with community agencies and businesses or local employers
- Facilitate student referrals to other agencies
- Link students with postsecondary special support coordinators
- Assessment and Career Counseling
- Transition Planning
- Education and Community Training
- Family Support and Resource

While you're in high school, it's extremely important that you take advantage of these services in order to get your career planning efforts underway. These services can not only help with employment, they can assist and guide you to your further educational opportunities.

### 2.) Post-secondary Education

After high school (secondary school) there is whole array of additional education opportunities available for you to consider. It's always a good idea to begin to think about these options while you're in high school. Of course, many people wait and may work for some time after high school before they consider their options for a post-secondary education. Whenever you begin to consider these options there are at least two important strategies to follow.

First, think about what type of work you might want to pursue. Obviously, if you like certain types of work, you'll be both happier and more successful in those jobs. Explore your career options by talking or networking with others. If you're not sure what you might like to do, that's fine. Most young people don't know what type of jobs or fields they would be happiest working in. In order to begin to identify jobs or careers that might interest you, think about your favorite subjects in school and which careers they might point towards. Or, take summer or part-time jobs (internships) in a sampling of occupational areas and test your interest in them. Or, take various vocational or occupational tests or assessments to see how you do (never let the results of these test make the decision for you – make it for yourself). Or, surf the internet for jobs and careers and see what seems to interest you. In short, engage in various career exploration activities like these.

Second, with some broad understanding or job preferences in mind, seek more information from others who know more about the fields and occupations you may have identified. Ask people in those fields to tell you more about them. Ask your school or career counselors for information about them. It's important that you do this preliminary work before you explore your post-secondary education options. Post-secondary schools cost money. As always, you should not buy something you don't want or need. The same is true with the spending of your money for tuition and fees for a postsecondary program.

Many people go on to a post-secondary education without a clear focus on a career goal. In fact, most young people just don't know themselves well enough or understand the types of occupational options available to them. Even so, they still go on to a post-secondary education program. It can be a great experience to help you learn more about career options. The truth is most people can't really make-up their minds about what work they would most want to do until they've experimented with various jobs. And, college internships are a great way to do that. So, going on to college and getting a degree will likely serve you well in whatever becomes your chosen field of work.

Of course, how much education you receive should always be based on your personal factors, such as your abilities, desires, resources and career goals. You should also understand the average potential earning gains associated with pursuing post-secondary education. You should never continue your education just for the money suggested by the data below; however, if you can and want to continue your education after high school there are increased financial rewards possible around such an investment.

Consider these facts.

On average (some people make more and some make less) college graduates earn \$2.2 million during their careers versus \$1.3 million for High School graduates with no college.

College course taken or study majors have an impact on potential life time earnings. For example, on average an education major has the potential to earn \$1.8 million during their careers. Arts majors can expect to earn about \$2 million. Financial majors earn \$3.1 million.

On average, those with master's degrees can expect to earn \$2.8 million life time earnings. While students earning their doctorate degree take home \$3.2 million. People with professional degrees (law, medicine) average \$3.6 million.

Lastly, if you do choose to enroll in a post-secondary education program, most of these programs have student career counseling centers which you should use to your advantage. Go and visit your campus' Career Center and learn what they have to offer.

### 3.) Career Fairs

These are special events which invite many employers to meet people who are looking for employment. You may find career fairs in your area. If you're in a post-secondary program, they have them all the time. Remember, employers participating in career fairs are interested in meeting people looking for work (that's you). This means attending a career fair can be a very productive way to test both your job readiness skills and learn more about their jobs. Career fairs have a similar look wherein each employer has a table, room or exhibit where they will be ready to meet job seekers like you. Before the fair, go to the career fair sponsor's website and review the online directory of employers who are coming. Note their job opportunities. If you spend a little time getting some background on the organizations which will be present, then you can ask them very focused and specific questions. This will impress the employers you'll meet because it shows that you have a genuine and thoughtful interest in working them. Also, when you go to a career fair be sure to bring a dozen or more copies of your resume to give to the employers you may meet. Your resume will help the employer remember who you are and how to reach you later.

### 4.) Internships

The biggest regret former students have after they've left school and been looking for their first job is "While in school, I really should have taken a job or an internship in addition to my course load". Well, unfortunately for them this lesson was learned too late. However, you can benefit from their mistake by not making the same one. Many students tell themselves that they've worked hard (true) all the school year and summer is a time for a well-earned rest. While they're resting, however, their fellow college students are engaged in a summer internship work experience and building their skills and resumes as well as helping them meet potential employers who often use the internship experience to decide who they want to hire permanently after graduation. Meanwhile, back at home, our exhausted students are not only resting during the summer break, they are also falling farther and farther behind in the job competition race because the people who they'll be competing against are working.

A survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers shows that internships are an integral and critical part of getting your first job out of college. The survey finds that employers draw approximately 40 percent of their new permanent hires from their prior internship ranks. These figures demonstrate the central role that internships play in the overall recruiting and hiring process.

### 5.) State Department of Rehabilitation

Every State and Territory has a State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR, DVS, or DOR). Many states (currently 15) have separate State Departments of Rehabilitation for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. These programs provide their state's residents with disabilities with a wide range of services designed to help them prepare for and engage in gainful employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. Eligible individuals are those who have a physical or mental impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment, who can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services for employment, and who require these services. If a state is unable to serve all eligible individuals, priority must be given to serving those individuals with the most significant disabilities (this is called an "order of selection").

Under these programs, an applicant for these services must first apply and be admitted based on various State criteria for eligibility. To determine your State's current DOR eligibility criteria, contact your nearest office. To locate your nearest office see: <http://www.askearn.org/state-vocational-rehabilitation-agencies/>

Here is a sample listing of the kinds of employment related services your State Department of Rehabilitation may be able to offer you should you qualify for their services

- Employment counseling and guidance
- Referrals and assistance to get services from other employment agencies
- Job search and placement assistance
- Vocational and other training services may be provided or supported
- Evaluation of a disability with respect to employment potential
- On-the-job personal assistance services
- Interpreter services (deaf or hearing impaired persons)
- Rehabilitation and orientation/mobility services
- Assistance with getting an occupational licenses, tools, equipment and initial supplies
- Technical assistance for self-employment
- Rehabilitation or employment related assistive technology
- Supported employment services (job coaches)
- Services to family members
- Transportation assistance as required to enable client to participate in their services
- Post-employment services to help you maintain your employment
- Transition services helping students from school to work

## 6.) Other Community Based Programs

Here are some key programs to consider.

### *“Centers for Independent Living”*

There are over 400 Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) or Independent Living Centers (ILC's) and 300 more branch offices across the country. Some of the services they may offer are:

- Peer Counseling/Advice
- Systems Change or Disability Advocacy
- Independent Living Skills training
- Information and Referral
- Assistive Technology
- Employment Services
- Living Well
- Accessible Residential Housing
- Personal Attendant Referrals
- Youth Services

To locate a CIL or ILC near you see: <http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>

### *“Community based rehabilitation (CBR) programs”*

Some major CBR’s are Goodwill Industries of America; National Industries for the Blind (NIB); National Federation for the Blind (NFB), NISH, CARF (Committee on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) or The Arc (serving people with intellectual disabilities). In addition to these major national organizations, many local independent community-based rehabilitation programs exist. To locate them in your area, contact your State’s Department of Rehabilitation and ask them for a listing or search the internet for one near you.

Here’s a broad listing of their possible services which might be available with CBR programs. Each one may be different.

- medical, psychiatric, psychological, social, and vocational services
- testing, fitting, or training in the use of prosthetic and orthotic devices
- recreational therapy
- physical and occupational therapy
- speech, language, and hearing therapy
- psychiatric, psychological, and social services, including positive behavior management
- assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs
- rehabilitation technology
- job development, placement, and retention services
- evaluation or control of specific disabilities
- orientation and mobility services for individuals who are blind
- extended employment
- psychosocial rehabilitation services
- supported employment services and extended services
- services to family members when necessary to the vocational rehabilitation of the individual
- personal assistance services

### *“America Job Centers” (Career One Stop Centers)*

American Job Centers, sometimes known as “Career One Stop” centers, are the place to visit to access the nation’s various state and federally funded public employment training and placement programs.

These programs are:

- Your source for employment information and inspiration
- The place to manage your career
- Your pathway to career success
- Tools to help job seekers, students, businesses and career professionals
- Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor

On July 22, 2014, the current law overseeing these programs was passed. It's called the "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act" (WIOA). Here are the enhanced supports for people with disabilities in this program:

- American Job Centers (AJC's) will provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.
- Youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services so they can successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.
- State vocational rehabilitation agencies will set aside at least 15 percent of their funding to provide transition services to youth with disabilities.
- A committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.
- Vocational Rehabilitation state grant programs will engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.

As you can see, a new and higher emphasis has been placed on providing people with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities moving from school to employment.

To find the American Job Center nearest you search: <http://www.servicelocator.org/>

### *"Self-employment and the Small Business Administration (SBA)"*

What if you're interested in working for yourself?

There are many advantages with self-employment. You can set your own work times and avoid some of the complexities of the regular work place. Of course, it's still work. In fact, many self-employed individuals actually work longer and harder than those in the general workplace. Plus, most small businesses fail which can leave their owners in difficult financial situations. So, it's not an easy way out; however, it may be both a more interesting and better employment option for you and your disability. Be sure not to move in the direction of opening your own business without a great deal of thought and analysis, both about your business idea (its potential for success) as well as what might be best for you.

There is a federal government agency that can assist you with this consideration. It's the Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA helps Americans start, build and grow businesses. Through an extensive network of field offices and partnerships with public and private organizations, SBA delivers its services to people throughout the country. The SBA and its nationwide network of resource partners help millions of potential and existing small business owners start, grow and succeed. You can access general SBA information at [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) or visit one of their local offices for assistance.

Also, the SBA offers specific guidance to people with disabilities who are interested in starting their own small business. SBA can assist you in several ways such as starting a business, financing a business, tax information, and trade and professional resources. For more detail on their disability specific resources and advice go to: <http://www.sba.gov/content/people-with-disabilities>