

# PREFACE

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## Background

The Virginia Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) has a long history of providing rehabilitative services to citizens of the Commonwealth with disabilities. Over time, progress in medical and assistive technology has challenged vocational rehabilitation professionals to redefine existing boundaries in determining eligibility for services. Rehabilitation practitioners continually seek innovative resources and programs that offer the possibility of increasing consumer productivity, earnings, integration, and independence.

Supported Employment (SE) services represent a valuable array of contemporary rehabilitation options. The goal is to maximize employment opportunities for persons with the most severe disabilities who require support in order to work in integrated, competitive employment. Unlike “evaluate-train-place” models of rehabilitation services, Supported Employment assesses, then places and trains consumers. An array of service options is needed for persons with disabilities. This **Guide** focuses on the array of options within SE programs. For the purposes of this **Guide**, the term “supported employment services” shall be used to refer collectively to the following:

1. The federally defined program of Supported Employment, and
2. Job Coach Training Services in Virginia.

The statewide system of Supported Employment services in Virginia was initially developed through a five-year grant from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). Service providers include the Division of Rehabilitative Services, local Community Services Boards, and Employment Services Organizations. Current efforts to strengthen the system focus on the following:

- ♦ Refining the skills of practitioners who provide supported employment services in Virginia;
- ♦ Improving linkages to ensure coordinated and effective services to individuals receiving Supported Employment services; and
- ♦ Promoting consumer choice, participation and responsibility.

Provision of Supported Employment services requires the participation of many agencies and individuals, each providing funding or direct consumer services from their own perspective. For the purposes of this *Guide*, the term “practitioner” shall be used to collectively refer to rehabilitation counselors, employment specialists, provider organizations, community mental health agencies, and other qualified individuals who are providers of Supported Employment services. The cooperation, collaboration and coordination of each of these practitioners is imperative to successfully serve persons through supported employment programs.

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## SE Providers Forums

Regional provider forums are being held for Supported Employment practitioners to receive information, to network, and to develop skills in improving services. These forums allow practitioners access to training needs on best practices, DRS procedures, and methods of monitoring consumer progress.

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## Guide Purpose

The purpose of the Guide to Supported Employment and Job Coach Training Services is to provide practical and specific information to supplement the ***Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure Manual***. Where possible, the Guide seeks to illustrate evolving best practices gleaned from case examples and data gathered in Virginia. Specifically, the Guide is intended to provide supported employment practitioners with guidance in:

- ♦ Achieving a customer-oriented environment that promotes consumer choice and participation, individual responsibility, practitioner excellence and sensitive delivery of quality services;
- ♦ Enhancing understanding of operational procedures and the need for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination;
- ♦ Clarifying and expanding on the roles, responsibilities, and expectations among supported employment practitioners; and
- ♦ Planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating supported employment programs

## Guide Preparation/Updates

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The original **Guide**, published in February of 1994, was the result of cooperative efforts of representatives from a variety of programs and agencies substantially involved in the provision of supported employment services to persons with severe disabilities. The **Office of Employment Services and Special Programs** of the Division of Rehabilitative Services prepared **the Guide** with input from a variety of resources. Recommendations and comments were received from, among others, administrative and direct services staff of DRS, the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), the VCU-RRTC, and SE providers.

Every effort has been made to ensure content consistency between this **Guide**, DRS manuals, provider agreements, and commonly used definitions.

The Field Rehabilitative Services – Support Team always welcomes input and feedback on this **Guide** and other resources developed and distributed by DRS for Supported Employment.

Please note that the guide uses certain terms interchangeably. A “job coach” and “employment specialist” is, for the purposes of the Guide, the same. Likewise, a consumer of supported employment services may be referred to as a “supported employee” or a “consumer.”

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## Guide Content and Organization

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The sections that follow serve collectively as a guide to Supported Employment services from the perspective of the Supported Employment practitioner’s needed information.

**Part I** is an overview of Supported Employment as defined by federal legislation, and as implemented in Virginia. The characteristics and advantages of various models are presented to assist practitioners in determining, with the consumer, which placement best fits the individual’s needs.

**Part II** provides the reader with an overview of the DRS Supported Employment process and emphasizes the various practitioner roles and responsibilities.

**Part III** highlights a number of best practices in consumer assessment, program planning, case management, monitoring and quality assurance to guide the rehabilitation counselor in the effective planning and delivery of Supported Employment services.

**Part IV** provides “nuts and bolts” information on authorizing, agency fund codes, invoicing, and extended services funding alternatives.

**Part V** defines and illustrates various Social Security Work Incentive programs.

# PART I

## AN INTRODUCTION TO SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

### Supported Employment Description

In the individual placement model, a single employee is placed in an integrated work setting in the community. The individual is employed by the business. Ongoing support services are provided by an employment specialist who is employed by an approved provider of supported employment services. The employment specialist typically provides the individual with initial job skill training on an intensive one-to-one basis for the entire workday. The employment specialist gradually decreases supports, as the individual becomes more proficient. Optimally, a system of “natural supports” is developed within the workplace and community, which facilitates success with extensive supports that are already occurring in the individual’s community.

### Case Example

The following case example illustrates the characteristics of a supported employment program:



*Jim is 27 years of age with no previous history of competitive employment. Until age 22, Jim was enrolled in a secondary-level day activity program for persons with moderate to severe intellectual disability. Since that time, he has participated in a center-based adult development program. Jim is*

*generally cooperative and his attendance record is very good. Jim’s primary functional limitations are his difficulty acquiring new skills, his slow work speed, and his distractibility.*

*After discussing Jim’s needs and determining his eligibility for DRS services, Jim’s rehabilitation counselor helped him develop his goals into an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The plan was based on Jim’s interests, his prior successes at the adult development program, and other available information. In developing the plan, the counselor felt that he needed more information regarding Jim’s job site preferences, as well as the specific supports that would be needed. Jim and his counselor met with an employment specialist who scheduled a situational assessment.*

*During the situational assessments, Jim performed several types of jobs in the community. This experience provided Jim, the counselor and the employment specialist with data on work performance and preferences. The situational assessment helped identify his vocational goal as well as identifying barriers to Jim’s employment in the community, and the support services he would need to become competitively employed in an integrated work setting.*

*For example, everyone agreed that Jim would initially need,*

*once job development by the employment specialist has occurred, intensive job skill training to learn the required skills. In addition, he would need intermittent intervention to help him develop appropriate behavior responses, and ongoing counseling and guidance to help him overcome work fears. After discussing with Jim, the counselor and employment specialist selected behavior-modeling techniques, which included multiple demonstrations, tactile intervention, and positive reinforcement.*

*The rehabilitation counselor planned and coordinated extended support services in the IPE that Jim would need throughout his employment. The plan also identified the local Community Services Board as the source of support services and as the source of funding beyond DRS case closure. The employment specialist would provide job coaching as needed as well as extensive long term supports at the work site.*

*Jim secured a job as a key grip at a local television station. His job is to make sure that the television cameras do not run over the connecting cables during filming of shows. Jim is also responsible for assisting a janitor in cleaning the television station.*

*The employment specialist provided Jim with intensive job skill training on a daily basis for the first few months of employment. In addition, the employment specialist helped Jim learn to use the public transportation system to get to and from work. The janitor helps Jim select the appropriate cleaning supplies and monitors the quality of his work. As Jim has progressed, the employment specialist has gradually reduced the amount and frequency of assistance provided to Jim at the work site.*

*Jim has now been employed for five months. He appears to be a willing worker and is generally liked and accepted by his supervisors and the other employees. The rehabilitation counselor continues to evaluate Jim’s progress and assist Jim and the employment specialist with problem solving. Jim’s case will be closed by DRS once he is stabilized in employment. However, the employment specialist will continue to provide the needed supports for as long as Jim is employed.*

### Federal Definition

The 2001 amended federal regulations for the State Supported Employment Services Program, reauthorized in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, define supported employment as:

“Competitive work in integrated work settings or employment in integrated work settings in which individuals are working toward competitive work, consistent with the strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of the individuals, for individuals with the most significant disabilities:

1. For whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred (or for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability), and
2. Who because of the nature and severity of their disability, need intensive supported employment services from DRS and long-term follow-along services (also called extended services) after transition from supported employment services.“

## Key Concepts

The federal definition includes several key concepts that warrant discussion:

- ◆ **Competitive Work** - Supported employment must provide full-time or part-time work. Weekly goals for hours of employment are to be determined on an individual basis. Competitive employment requires the payment of a minimum wage. Wage compensation must be made in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act. The person with a disability in supported employment must be paid wages on a basis consistent with wages paid to non-disabled workers with similar job functions.

The amended federal regulations establish the setting of an individualized weekly work requirement as a component of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The transition from time-limited services, sponsored by the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency, to extended services, funded by a source other than Federal “110” funds, should not occur until the supported employee is stable in employment. In addition to fair wage compensation, the supported employee should receive the same benefit package provided to all eligible employees.

- ◆ **Integrated Work Setting** - The employment must provide daily contact in the immediate work setting with other employees and/or the general public. There is no limit on the number of individuals with disabilities who can be clustered together in the work setting. However, Individual Competitive Employment is the preferred option.

Criteria in this area of the federal regulations have not changed. Work in integrated settings for persons with most severe disabilities is one of the founding principles of supported employment. This principle is consistent with the concept of least restricted environment established in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Integration in the work place is inextricably tied to social inclusion in the larger community as a whole.

- ◆ **Ongoing Support Services** - The individual can be provided supports such as job site training, transportation, family support, or any service necessary to achieve and maintain the supported placement throughout the term of employment. Ongoing supports must include, at a minimum, twice monthly monitoring at the work site until the DRS case is closed with the supported employee to assess job stability. In some cases, off site monitoring may be necessary due to the nature of the consumer’s

disability.

Ongoing support services are regarded by RSA to be time-limited services. The maximum time limit for VR sponsorship of ongoing supports is 18 months following placement, unless the IPE indicates that more than 18 months are needed for the employee to achieve job stability. The time need not be consecutive days worked. That is, for the supported employee placed more than once, the 18-month period begins anew.

The amended federal regulations expand the definition of ongoing supports beyond job skill training as the only type of ongoing support. Instead, ongoing services may include a variety of supports needed for the supported employee to achieve and maintain job stability. The regulations further allow for ongoing support services to be provided by skilled job trainers, co-workers of the supported employee, or other qualified individuals. Dependent upon the type of support(s) being provided, a qualified individual may be a family member, a supervisor, or other person.

- ◆ **Long-term Follow Along/Extended Services** - Usually referred to as long-term follow along, extended services are services provided once the time-limited services sponsored by the state VR agency are completed and consist of specific services needed to maintain the supported employment placement. The source of extended services must be documented in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). If extended services are not immediately available prior to the initiation of the IPE, but the counselor has a reasonable expectation that extended services will be available when the consumer is stabilized in the job, the plan can be initiated. Extended services are to be paid for with funds from sources other than the Titles I, VI, IIIC, or IIID of the Federal Rehabilitation Act.

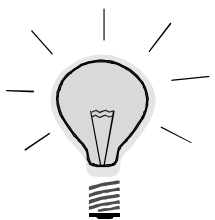
Based on guidance from RSA, Virginia DRS has adopted the following definition of long-term follow along/extended services:

**Long-term follow along/Extended services** means ongoing support services provided by an approved provider that are sufficient to maintain a person with a most significant disability in employment after DRS case closure. These services may consist of but are not limited to:

- ◆ direct face to face contact and intervention with the consumer and/or employer on a regular basis
- ◆ phone or other communication with the consumer or employer on a regular basis
- ◆ development and maintenance of natural workplace supports.

With the agreement of the consumer, DRS counselor and ESO job coach either bimonthly or quarterly contacts with the consumer would be acceptable to DRS provided that:

- ◆ the consumer and family understand the frequency,
- ◆ the consumer is given access to follow along supports if needed sooner than the next scheduled contact, and
- ◆ the ongoing supports being provided are adequate to meet the client's needs with respect to maintaining employment. The type of contact may be either face to face or by other means. Otherwise, the frequency and type of contact must be provided on a sufficient basis, based on consumer need, in order to ensure that the consumer is maintained in employment.



The provision of extended services by a provider and funding source beyond VR case closure ensures continuity of ongoing support. The provision of extended services differentiates supported employment from the traditional rehabilitation model of job placement, short-term (90-day) follow-

up, and termination of VR services. However, in contrast to discrete post employment services provided after case closure, extended services are long-term (for as long as the individual needs them to maintain employment), multifaceted supports.

SE will serve persons having the most significant disabilities. DRS considers individuals with “most significant disabilities” when they meet the following criteria: (1) Is an individual with a significant disability (2) has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three or more functional capacities (including, but not limited to, mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work skills or work tolerance) in terms of an employment outcome; and (3) whose vocational rehabilitation which can be expected to require multiple (more than one) core vocational rehabilitation services for six months or more.

Individuals who have a most significant disability include, but are not limited to, those who need one or more of the following types of disability related assistance to enhance their employment opportunities and independent functioning:

- ◆ Supported Employment as the appropriate employment placement
- ◆ Personal assistance and intervention accessing such services
- ◆ Frequent or extensive assistance from rehabilitation professionals to acquire employment or independent

living accommodations

- ◆ Long-term case management coordination
- ◆ Ongoing or intermittent assistance from mental health day or residential programs
- ◆ Supported Living
- ◆ Family support in order to provide disability-related assistance to the individual

## Target Population

Supported employment extends services to persons with most significant disabilities that previously might not have been considered as having the potential for employment and not found eligible for state VR services. While SE had its national beginnings in serving persons with an intellectual disability, services in Virginia can be appropriate for persons with other most significant disabilities who have the desire to work in competitive employment in integrated settings. Supported employment is not a disability-specific service option.

## Models of Supported Employment

This section describes four models of supported employment currently in use in Virginia. The specific characteristics of each model are presented in terms of the work setting, supervision, job duties, and similar considerations. The individual placement and group models of supported employment each offer some inherent advantages. Practitioners should consider the advantages of the various models, as well as the suitability of the model to the individual, when selecting the most appropriate model.

### Individual Placement Model

The case examples given earlier featuring Jim and Mike illustrate the individual placement model of supported employment. An employment specialist places one person at a job site, provides support, and then gradually reduces time and assistance at the work site.

As described in the beginning of the section, in the individual placement model, a single supported employee is placed in an integrated work setting in the community. The individual is an employee of the business. An employment specialist, who is employed by an approved provider of supported employment services, provides ongoing support services. The employment specialist typically provides the individual with initial job skill training on an intensive one-to-one basis for the entire workday or based on the needs of the individual. The employment specialist gradually decreases supports, as the individual becomes more proficient. Optimally, a system of “natural supports”, that is support by the employer, coworkers, family and friends is developed within the workplace and community.

The individual placement model is the most prevalent and widely utilized by rehabilitation counselors in Virginia. The individual placement model offers the following advantages:

- ◆ Flexibility in tailoring ongoing support services to the specific needs of the supported employee and the employer;
- ◆ Maximum integration of the supported employee in the work setting and community with employees and other individuals without disabilities;

- ◆ Facilitation in the development of a system of natural supports in the workplace and community;
- ◆ Ease in determining the point of transfer of programmatic and financial responsibility from initial DRS sponsorship to long-term service provider support; and
- ◆ Gradual reduction in support costs, and increased employee earnings (based on state and national data gathered by VCU-RRTC).

## Group Placements

### Definition of Group Models

The Code of Federal regulations define an SE group as having more than one consumer on site. Most enclaves/mobile crews have at least three consumers with a supervisor and trainer as needed.

By definition, an enclave or mobile crew is integrated as both are in the community. A person working in an SE group setting is considered successfully employed by DRS and therefore would be considered a successful DRS closure even if the consumer is making less than minimum wage.

Enclaves/mobile crews pay may be based on productivity as allowed under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Organizations must follow the Federal Wage and Hour guidelines when determining wages. A consumer may be paid minimum wage or below as long as federal guidelines are met. Some groups SE sites pay more than minimum wage such as those in NISH sites.

Group models of supported employment offer the following advantages:

- ◆ An established mechanism for provision of ongoing support services for those persons who require a greater degree of (supervised) structured support in order to be successful in competitive employment;
- ◆ Ease in coordination and delivery of services to multiple supported employees;
- ◆ Consolidation of supported employment services contracts among a few service providers and employers, and,
- ◆ An additional option for the consumer to move offsite from a sheltered setting, increase wages, and development of more interdependence in the community.

### Enclave Model

In the enclave model, a small group of supported employees is placed at a job site in the community where they work together or are dispersed within an integrated setting. The individuals in the enclave may be employed either by the employer or by the provider of supported employment services. An employment specialist functioning as a full-time enclave supervisor provides ongoing support services. The enclave supervisor may be employed either by the employer or by the provider.

*In Richmond, an enclave that illustrates the elements of this model has been developed. A group of four supported employees arrives at the site of the employer, a major book and magazine publisher, by van or on their own. The individuals in the enclave work side-by-side, processing subscription orders at individual workstations in the business*

*facility. They are physically integrated into the larger work environment with employees without disabilities and enjoy the same benefits as others who work there. The employment specialist stays with them and does not reduce his presence completely (fading), as it is expected that they will require intensive ongoing supports for as long as they are employed.*

### Mobile Work Crew Model

In the Mobile Work Crew Model, a small group of supported employees travel together to one or more integrated work settings in the community where they perform contract work such as custodial, grounds-keeping and similar functions. The provider employs the individuals on the work crew. A full-time supervisor who is also employed by the provider provides ongoing support services.

*A mobile work crew in Southwest Virginia illustrates this model. A work crew of eight supported employees performs custodial duties at several different itinerant stops each day. Supported employees on the work crew clean and dust, vacuum, strip, wax and buff floors, empty trash and do light maintenance work. They receive daily supervision and training from the employment specialist who functions as the crew leader. The provider usually purchases the equipment and provides transportation services to and from the various work sites.*

Who should be employed in an enclave or mobile work crew instead of SE individual placement?

In all cases, selection into one of these settings should be adapted to meet the need of the consumer. A consumer capable of entering competitive employment with hourly follow along services does not require the more restricted and supervised enclave or mobile crew model. Enclave and mobile work crews are predominantly for consumers that need more work supports than a supported employment individual placement. Though one may eventually work in an individual placement after experience in a group, enclaves and mobile crews are generally not interim training programs but long term employment programs.

### GUIDANCE FOR GROUP SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

1. The rehabilitation team can recommend that an individual is assessed by an employment specialist other than the one supervising the group because of the consumer's functional limitations as a result of the consumer's disability. The team should consist, at a minimum, of the DRS counselor, the employment specialist and the consumer.
2. The assessment must be prescriptive in nature and individualized for the person. While DRS requires that, at a minimum, the Situational Assessment Form (SE Form 1) be completed as it meets CARF requirements, other additional information, that is prescriptive in nature such as behavioral and learning issues, should be acquired and documented by the employment specialist.
3. The situational assessment should address specific vocational rehabilitation issues needed for program and vocational planning that cannot be obtained in any other circumstances or available records including those from schools, CSBs, or other Agencies.

4. The assessment must have a formalized protocol that includes task analysis of the specific job duties required in the enclave or mobile work crew.
5. Some of the results obtained from the assessment must include an overview of the knowledge, skills and abilities that could be transferred to other jobs.
6. The hours requested and authorized must be based on individual consumer needs, not requested as a matter of course.
7. If the situational assessment is performed as a “tryout” for the enclave or mobile work crew where the assessment takes place, the assessment is authorized at the approved **daily** rate. An assessment or “try out” should only be completed if there is an opportunity for immediate placement in the general area being assessed or tried.
8. Usually the above defined hourly assessment is the exception rather than norm. When completed, the transferability of findings should preclude the need for further hourly assessments.

There should not be any job development hours billed as the enclave/mobile crew has already been established with different jobs already defined.

### Entrepreneurial Model

*A small furniture refinishing company was developed in the Richmond area. Eight supported employees work in the business in a small industrial and office park. The employees performed all activities associated with furniture refinishing. They worked under the supervision of a business manager and several other employees without disabilities, who were trained in intervention and natural support techniques. The supported employees interacted with customers and other non-disabled individuals in the vicinity of the business.*

In the Entrepreneurial Model, a small group of supported employees produces goods or services either on a sub-contract basis or as a prime manufacturer. The individuals in the group, along with the managers and other employees actually comprise the business. Support services are provided by managers and other employees without disabilities who are employed by the business. Supported employees interact with the general public and other employees

### Selection of SE Models

Establishment of the various models of supported employment in Virginia has largely occurred over the past 20 years. Recent developments have necessitated increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques, job development activities, and support services. During this time, best practices have emerged, which guide practitioners in selecting a particular model with an individual.

In all cases, selection and application of the models of supported employment should be adapted to meet the need of the consumer. In determining the suitability of a model for a particular individual, the practitioner should consider the following:

- ♦ What model will provide the consumer with the best opportunity for successful integration, reduction in supports, and career advancement over time? (I.e., will the individual demonstrate progress and “mature” from highly structured and visible support models to a model

having less overt support?)

- ♦ What model represents the least restrictive setting that is feasible and appropriate?
- ♦ What model will allow the consumer to be most independent and productive and is consistent with knowledge, skills and abilities?
- ♦ What model is the consumer most comfortable with?
- ♦ What is the quality of the services available in each model?

### Job Coach Training Services (JCTS)

Some individuals may require intensive initial support, but will not require extended supports on a long-term basis. DRS developed a flexible model of Job Coach Training Services to meet the needs of those consumers.

### Case Example

The following case example illustrates Job Coach Training Services in Virginia:

*Shelly is a 22 year-old woman who has a severe hearing impairment and is mentally challenged. She was referred to DRS by her mother because of repeated difficulty getting or keeping a job. The longest period Shelly had worked, when she did get employment, was only two days.*

*The counselor arranged to meet with Shelly and an interpreter. Shelly indicated through the interpreter that she was frustrated because employers said she was “too slow.” After diagnostic testing, Shelly’s eligibility for services was established. She and her counselor scheduled a vocational evaluation to explore her job interests, aptitudes and skills.*

*During vocational evaluation, Shelly demonstrated excellent general worker traits and aptitudes for assembly and machine operation. However, she did have difficulty learning new tasks, responding appropriately to change, and getting oriented to her work environment. Shelly gave many indications of being sociable, yet she tended not to associate with others during evaluation.*

*Shelly and her counselor agreed that she needed intensive initial training at the job site, more intensive than an on-the-job-training (OJT) program would provide. Her counselor felt this would probably be too time-consuming for many employers to provide. Yet, they both agreed that once acclimated and trained in her new environment, Shelly would not need these or other support services beyond the first few months.*

*An employment specialist who specialized in job site accommodations participated in a problem-solving session to discuss intensive training strategies, orientation, and integration issues. Everyone felt that Shelly’s training would be effective if the job site were safe and accessible, and early communication techniques with her co-workers and supervisor were developed.*

*Shelly was interviewed with an interpreter present, and subsequently hired by a major optical corporation as an Assembler and Machine Operator. The employment specialist, with the assistance of the interpreter, provided one-on-one training to enable Shelly to develop speed and quality*

*production skills. The employment specialist also made adjustments to Shelly's work environment to make it safer and more efficient for her. Most importantly, the employment specialist helped Shelly to develop good work relationships and effective communications with other persons at the corporation.*

*Shelly no longer requires any support services. The rehabilitation counselor has successfully closed her case. Today, Shelly continues to have positive work relationships and competent production skills.*

## Key Concepts

Job Coach Training Services include job development, job placement, job skill training, transportation training, and other time-limited support services sponsored by DRS. Extended support services are not provided on a long-term basis. The DRS counselor can authorize JCTS only when the consumer does **not** require ongoing support services on an extended basis beyond DRS case closure.

Therefore, this program does not meet the criteria of the federal regulations for supported employment. The consumer may be regarded as either "most significantly disabled" or "significantly disabled" if the agency sponsors this service for the consumer.

## Target Population

Studies and direct experience have shown that more cognitively and behaviorally impaired individuals require more ongoing support services on an extended basis. For example, a consumer who has multiple severe disabilities, no prior work experience, and little or no family support may be an appropriate candidate for supported employment. By contrast, a consumer who is most severely disabled and needs intensive initial training to learn a complex job or to increase productivity, but who does not require extended services, could be provided with Job Coach Training Services or other appropriate services.

Counselor judgment, along with input from those most familiar with the consumer's functional skills and needs, should be utilized in determining the appropriateness of JCTS, regardless of specific disability. Key questions to be asked in selecting this service option are:

- ◆ What is the functional level of the consumer and anticipated need for supports?
- ◆ Is there a lengthy or consistent history of successful competitive employment?
- ◆ What is the complexity of the consumer's desired job placement?
- ◆ What family, employer or other support systems already exist or could be developed?

Persons with severe physical disabilities such as spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, or hearing impairments can often obtain and maintain employment without extended services. For these individuals, rehabilitation engineering and JCTS may be more efficient and effective.

Some persons with serious mental illness may require only intermittent intervention and JCTS, as opposed to ongoing extended services. Other individuals with serious mental

illness may require developmental supports on a long-term basis.

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AS AN EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE

Programs providing employment supports are a valuable resource for people with severe mental illness seeking competitive employment. Employment is a key component of recovery. Individuals with severe mental illness who hold competitive jobs for an extended period of time frequently experience a number of benefits, including improvements in their self-esteem and symptom control.

Effective employment programs targeting individuals with severe mental illness emphasize encouraging interest and building confidence in working, getting a job consistent with individual work goals, and retaining employment. Employment services that follow seven evidenced-based practices have proven successful in assisting people with severe mental illness in achieving and sustaining employment outcomes. The following information summarizes these seven key practices and provides additional resources on effective employment supports for all individuals who need supported employment, not just those experiencing severe mental illness.

### 1. Participation in the employment program is based on consumer choice.

True consumer choice requires access to the information necessary to make an informed choice. Practices that encourage informed consumer choice about employment include:

- ◆ Creating an atmosphere where anyone who chooses to work can work.
- ◆ Asking consumers if they want to work as soon as they enter the employment program.
- ◆ Promoting employment consistently and regularly as a positive, achievable outcome.
- ◆ Encouraging consumers to talk about their fears and concerns about work and providing the assistance needed to address these concerns.
- ◆ Building confidence by giving attention to each individual's strengths and motivations.

Programs that successfully promote informed consumer choice take a systematic approach incorporating these practices. These programs recognize that for individuals with severe mental illness, consumer characteristics do not predict success in competitive employment. Gender, ethnicity, diagnosis, hospitalization history, cognitive functioning, education, or substance abuse history are not predictors of employment success. Instead, employment programs are most successful when they operate on the principle of "zero exclusion." Anyone who expresses a desire to work and makes an informed choice to participate in an employment program is eligible.

For a variety of reasons, programs that use the zero exclusion approach do not assess consumers for work readiness using traditional methods, such as standardized aptitude tests. These assessment methods have in the past screened out consumers with mental illness at a high rate, including many who could successfully work, and take resources away from services that

could be better directed to helping people find jobs. Also, most standardized assessment approaches do not actually predict which individuals will work. And finally, these assessments typically do not give information about what interventions to offer as a way to help consumers work successfully.

## **2. Employment supports are integrated with mental health treatment.**

It is critically important for consumers with severe mental illness that employment supports be integrated with any mental health treatment. Employment efforts are unlikely to be effective if the person is not receiving adequate clinical case management. Practices that encourage integration of employment services and supports with mental health treatment include:

- ◆ Employment support team members are in close and frequent contact with the mental health case managers.
- ◆ Treatment plans and employment plans are coordinated and mutually supportive.
- ◆ Treatment team meetings include the employment staff and consideration of employment plans and issues.

For integration of employment and mental health services to be effective, there must be genuine collaboration and mutual problem solving. For example, medication or housing changes should always be coordinated with employment changes. If they aren't, responsibility for follow-up becomes unclear, and employment staff may be caught up doing crisis intervention, a role more appropriately fulfilled by case managers.

Integration of employment and mental health services contributes to lower employment program dropout rates, because case managers are involved in keeping consumers engaged. Clinicians and employment specialists report better communication. Clinicians become involved and excited about employment, and the close working relationship between the clinicians and the employment team results in clinical information being a part of the vocational plan.

## **3. Services are focused on competitive employment as the goal.**

Individuals with severe mental illness have historically received services in day treatment or sheltered programs that focus on an array of rehabilitation activities, protected job options, or short-term work experiences. However, prevocational preparation, extended career counseling, or other work readiness activities do not effectively promote competitive employment outcomes. In comparison, practices that focus on competitive employment as the goal include:

- ◆ Targeting attention and resources on work as a goal from the moment the individual enters the program.
- ◆ Stating the benefits of work and encouraging success.
- ◆ Avoiding spending time and resources on work readiness experiences or extended periods of assessment.
- ◆ Assuring that assessments occur rapidly and build on the desire and motivation of the consumer to seek work.

In providing employment services and supports, it's essential to devote resources and energy to assisting consumers with

finding competitive jobs. From the moment a consumer begins the program, communicate a clear message that an integrated competitive employment outcome is the goal and focus all employment services and supports on directly meeting that goal. Avoid volunteer approaches or paid employment options that are not drawn from the competitive employment job market.

## **4. A rapid job search approach is used.**

A rapid job search approach means that contact will be made with employers within the first month after a consumer enters the employment program. Most consumers with mental health support needs prefer to work towards an employment outcome instead of going through transitional preparatory activities. In fact, work readiness or other preparatory activities that delay competitive work can actually reduce prospects for community employment. Practices focusing on a rapid job search include:

- ◆ Providing direct assistance in job finding through job leads and active job development.
- ◆ Emphasizing on-the-job training with supports at the job site.
- ◆ Obtaining rapid approval from funding agencies for employment plans.

A rapid job search will not take place when there is limited coordination between the funding entity and the employment agency. Schedule regular staffing or case conferences to be sure information is shared as necessary. The job search process will vary in strategy and timing from person to person. However, established collaborative practices among key stakeholders in the job search process will help support a rapid movement to employment.

## **5. Job finding is individualized with attention to consumer preferences.**

Job finding is a collaborative process between the consumer and the employment support team. This process emphasizes use of a consumer's preferences, strengths, and prior work experiences. Practices that focus on consumer preferences include:

- ◆ Working closely with consumers' personal interests.
- ◆ Seeking jobs and workplace environments that match individual preferences.
- ◆ Helping individuals make informed choices about disclosing the presence of a disability to employers.
- ◆ Working closely with the consumer and employer on identifying and negotiating needed workplace accommodations.

The collaborative process between the consumer and the employment support team emphasizes job selection that takes into account job duties, location, hours of employment, work environment, and other factors related to satisfaction and success in working. Job matching can include arranging customized employment opportunities with employers through job carving, negotiating job descriptions, or creating job descriptions. Consumers are much less likely to quit their jobs if these initial positions are consistent with their preferences. In addition, consumers working in fields

consistent with their preferences have higher job satisfaction.

## **6. Supports are ongoing.**

Placing arbitrary time limits on supports after a person is employed is very detrimental to employment success.

Practices that emphasize the continued availability of ongoing supports include:

- ◆ Assisting individuals in discovering their true job interests by working in competitive employment.
- ◆ Maintaining direct supports to consumers and employers (where appropriate to an employment plan) after obtaining work.
- ◆ Assisting people with moving into new jobs as long-term job interests are clarified.

## **7. Benefits counseling is used to educate consumers on the effect of earnings on benefits.**

Some individuals with significant disabilities receive disability benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Many also receive benefits related to health care, housing and/or food assistance.

Benefits planning services are an important employment support. Practices that focus on benefits planning include:

- ◆ Assuring that consumers have access to professional benefits counselors and understand the interaction between work earnings and disability-related benefits.
- ◆ Addressing fully the many concerns individuals have about the potential loss of benefits after employment, fears that are frequently based on rumors and misconceptions.
- ◆ Assuring that job plans (in terms of hours of employment, pay and benefits) are coordinated with benefit plans developed during benefits counseling.

The Social Security Administration has implemented a program called, Ticket to Work, to assist individuals with disabilities who receive SSDI and/or SSI. These services provide information and direct assistance on how benefit programs and work incentives interface with earnings from employment and self-employment. There is a list under the "Find Help" link on [www.chooseworkttw.net](http://www.chooseworkttw.net).

## **Conclusion**

These seven principles establish a core framework for building an effective program of employment supports for individuals with severe mental illness. The principles have direct implications for employment service providers, agencies that purchase employment services, and consumers of these services.

Employment programs that follow these evidence-based practices will be more likely to effectively and successfully assist consumers with severe mental illness in meeting their employment goals.

(The section on evidence based practices is from the April 2005 issue of T-TAP used with permission and published by Virginia Commonwealth University and the Institute for Community Inclusion University of Massachusetts, Boston).

# **PART II**

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE INTERAGENCY SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROCESS**

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **The Rehabilitation Counselor**

The examples of individuals receiving supported employment services in Part I illustrate the important and various roles of the vocational rehabilitation counselor throughout the interagency supported employment process. The counselor assists the consumer with setting goals, monitors their implementation by the consumer and provider/provider, assesses consumer progress, and provides input to the provider to insure quality services for the consumer. The counselor has lead responsibility for planning and coordinating SE services to ensure quality and successful consumer outcomes.

This counseling and coordination role continues after the job placement phase as the counselor works in collaboration with the provider providing services. The rehabilitation counselor continues to play a monitoring role after case closure, interacting with the provider of extended services.

General responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor in the supported employment process include:

- ◆ Using informed choice as a way to assist consumers in choosing the most appropriate provider for services
- ◆ Collaboration with consumers, family, community programs and service providers in the development and implementation of a supported employment rehabilitation plan;
- ◆ Advocacy for the development and/or expansion of services and providers to meet the support needs of DRS consumers.

The counselor's responsibility for coordinating SE services necessitates fundamental knowledge and skills. The counselor should draw upon his/her knowledge of the interagency process and resources. Examples of some of these areas include:

- ◆ Knowledge of supported employment philosophy, regulations, and emerging service delivery techniques;
- ◆ Skill in developing interagency collaboration and techniques for consensus building;
- ◆ Skill in planning, delivering, and assessing services to consumers with most severe and/or multiple disabilities, including consumers with low-incidence disabilities (such as deaf-blindness), and those with newly recognized disabilities (such as traumatic brain injury);
- ◆ Knowledge of state and local resources to aid in developing systems of natural supports in the work place and community for consumers and families; and
- ◆ An assessment of the need for assistive technology.

#### **Counselor Best Practices in Delivery of Supported Employment Services**

The DRS Counselor has the lead responsibility in choosing appropriate services, monitoring the quality of services and coordinating the "players" involved in the supported employment process. In monitoring service delivery and consumer progress, the rehabilitation counselor has lead

responsibility for communication, quality assurance and coordination throughout the SE implementation process.

#### **Job Development**

During the job development process (usually in the "Service" status, formerly Status 18), the rehabilitation counselor can assist in many areas. Counselor involvement in the stage prior to placement (program planning from application to service) will impact favorably on the efficiency and economy of the job development process. It is very important that the job match be developed for the particular employee. Factors to consider in the process of matching jobs to prospective consumers include the following:

- ◆ Availability and type of supervision and supports available at the job;
- ◆ Transportation requirements and resources for the consumer to utilize in meeting the work schedule;
- ◆ Job responsibilities, production requirements, and degree of independence in the position; and
- ◆ Hours of employment, work environment and work schedule.

Specific responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor in the job development process include:

- ◆ Providing sufficient funding of needed services;
- ◆ Assisting employment specialist with placement leads;
- ◆ Providing guidance on appropriateness of potential leads whether developed by consumer, employment specialist or others;
- ◆ Providing specific direction, and coordinating and monitoring job development efforts of employment specialist;
- ◆ Problem-solving and planning workable strategies with the employment specialist.

Counselor responsibilities in promoting consumer readiness for employment include:

- ◆ Providing the consumer counseling and guidance on appropriate interviewing and work behaviors;
- ◆ Assisting the consumer and family in learning about supported employment expectations;
- ◆ Assisting the consumer and family in understanding Social Security Work Incentives (SSWI) and arranging and keeping appointments with the Social Security Administration, when applicable;
- ◆ Communicating by phone and reviewing monthly written reports to provide additional guidance and to request relevant information.

## **Job Placement**

Specific counselor responsibilities in job placement (“Service” Status, formerly Status 18) include:

- ◆ Completing Work Opportunities Tax Credit (WOTC) forms when applicable;
- ◆ Arranging to visit the consumer on the job site with the employment specialist;
- ◆ Arranging for staffing meetings to problem-solve as necessary and communicating regularly with the job coach and consumer;
- ◆ Monitoring and providing information and assistance regarding: wage and hour requirements, appropriateness of placement, integration, number of hours worked, need for adaptations, and offsite supports, e.g. transportation, recreation/leisure services etc.

## **Job Training/Stabilization**

Specific responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor during job training and stabilization include:

- ◆ Providing sufficient funding of needed services;
- ◆ Providing troubleshooting suggestions and monitoring consumer progress on vocational and related goals;
- ◆ Remaining in close communication with job coach, employment specialist, consumer, and family, as appropriate;
- ◆ Reviewing monthly written reports, maintaining telephone contacts, amending the IPE as necessary
- ◆ Accurately recording status changes from “Service” (formerly status 18) to “Employed” (formerly status 22) upon first day of starting paid employment.

- ◆ Individual SE or JCTS cases. Changing to “Employed” status (formerly status 22) after 60 days of stability for cases served in an SE group model.
- ◆ Remaining an active part of the rehabilitation process including visiting the consumer on the job to ensure that the consumer and employer are satisfied as well as ensuring that appropriate services are being provided by the job coach.
- ◆ Collaborating with the SE Provider in reference to Long-Term Follow-Along source. Approving Long-Term Employment Support Services (LTESS) applications before they are submitted by the ESO. Providing expertise and input in utilization of LTESS dollars for long term follow-along.

## **Post-Employment Services**

In many instances consumers may need to be retrained, or trained in a new job duty once long-term follow along services begin. LTESS funds do not support training or retraining services, only services that provide job maintenance. If the DRS case is closed the counselor may wish to consider funding the necessary training through post-employment services. LTESS funds will continue to support the follow along services while training services are funded by DRS. The steps necessary to provide this service are outlined in the FRS Policy and Procedures Manual.

## **Employment Service Organizations**

Providers of supported employment services include rehabilitation facilities; Community Services Board operated programs, and both private non-profit and for-profit organizations. In order to become a DRS approved provider, the organization must submit for approval program manuals/curriculum guidelines among other required documentation for the service intended to be provided. Applications also require written support of the local DRS supervisor of the office that will be the purchaser of those services. In addition, the provider must submit a Purchase of Service Application in order to determine the initial rates by the Field Rehabilitative Services – Support Team (FRS-ST). Specific guidance may be obtained from the appropriate staff member of FRS-ST. Forms may be found on the Virginia DRS website, [www.vadrs.org](http://www.vadrs.org). Providers of employment services must also become a CARF accredited organization within a year of approval.

It is an absolute requirement for provider approval that the applicant organization’s capacity and commitment to provide ongoing support services be documented in writing.

## **The Rehabilitation Counselor and Employment Specialist: Working Together to Provide Quality Services**

One of the most important aspects of the rehabilitation process is the relationship between the DRS counselor and the employment specialist. The parties need to build a relationship built on trust and regular communication in order to ensure that appropriate services are planned and provided to their mutual consumers.

The employment specialist functions in the following roles:

- ◆ Assists consumer in job interviewing and job site orientation as needed. Assures with the counselor, that the following criteria are addressed: appropriateness of placement, community integration, number of hours of work as identified in the IPE, job site accommodations, off-site support services (e.g., transportation, family support, etc.). Arranges for DRS counselor to visit the consumer at the job site as appropriate; shares information on consumer progress.
- ◆ Provides the consumer with job skill training and/or other support services as necessary and in a manner consistent with the IPE. Informs DRS counselor as to consumer progress, stabilization of consumer on job, and need for related services through monthly written reports and phone contacts.
- ◆ Ensures consumer stability and satisfaction in job with provision of needed supports. Ensures satisfaction of employer with consumer performance. Jointly facilitate transition meeting with counselor to transfer consumer to extended services (long-term support). Informs DRS counselor as to consumer progress and provision of extended services.
- ◆ Provides consumer with extended support services in collaboration with CSB case manager, DRS Counselor, other service providers, and family, as necessary to maintain job stability. Assists consumer in retraining for job upgrading or assists in continuing job stabilization.

The employment specialist has the following specific responsibilities in his/her role as the primary direct service provider of ongoing supports:

- ◆ Implements systematic data collection and follow-along procedures to monitor consumer performance and progress;
- ◆ Makes decisions regarding the need for skill or production training, compensatory strategies, behavior management programs, travel training, job site modification, and/or assistive devices;
- ◆ Communicates with consumer, the rehabilitation counselor, family members or residential staff, and the funding representative;
- ◆ Addresses concerns of the employer and co-workers;
- ◆ Advocates on behalf of the supported employee and develops natural support systems within the workplace;
- ◆ Coordinates schedules to respond to follow-along needs of the supported employee; and
- ◆ Assists with job mobility and re-placement services.

The amount and frequency of supports provided by employment specialist are reduced following the initial training phase (fading). It is therefore critical that the employment specialist devises a method of ongoing assessment of consumer performance and employer satisfaction that utilizes input from a variety of sources. Methods of evaluating consumer progress and determining intervention strategies include: periodic employee evaluations, progress reports, parent/guardian/caregiver feedback, onsite visits, and telephone contacts with employers and family members or other residential staff.

The employment specialist/provider will also provide billing, progress reports, and other data gathering instruments as outlined in the Appendix D of the provider agreement. Since all LTESS applications must be approved by a DRS counselor, the employment specialist should obtain this approval and document it in the case file before the application is submitted.

# PART III

## USEFUL PRACTICES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The following section highlights a number of practices in consumer assessment, program planning, case management, monitoring and quality assurance that can guide the rehabilitation counselor in the effective planning and delivery of supported employment services.

### Assessment in Supported Employment

As stated in the federal regulations, determination of eligibility for VR services must take into consideration the individual's potential to benefit from supported employment services. The counselor can often determine an individual's eligibility for VR services, including potential for supported employment, based on existing information. Such information would include the consumer's personal history, training and employment experiences, and other relevant information contained in diagnostic and general evaluation reports. However, after gathering existing information, the counselor might still have significant questions regarding the nature and scope of services needed and the best model for providing those services.

### Using Vocational Evaluation Information

Vocational evaluation has traditionally provided the counselor with information regarding the individual's eligibility for DRS services and feasibility for supported employment based upon the "evaluate-place-train" model. Persons with most severe or multiple disabilities who were assessed using traditional normative or comparative work samples were sometimes found infeasible for supported employment (and therefore, ineligible for DRS services) because of the severity of their limitations. Much progress has been made in the field of vocational evaluation in terms of considering an individual's employment potential if provided with assistive technology and other necessary support services.

A thorough vocational evaluation can yield valuable, transferable information that can be reported to the counselor and generalized to the community. The information can be utilized in such a way that the consumer's needs for supports, transportation, behavioral intervention, etc. can be identified, especially if the counselor requests this specific information of the evaluator. Integration of vocational evaluation, within the supported employment process adds to the continuum of services and can potentially decrease provided costs. Situational assessment is another tool that is available to the counselor in determining whether an individual with a most severe disability can benefit from supported employment services.

### Situational Assessment

In situational assessment, the individual completes work tasks in one or more competitive employment environments in the community. A key question for deciding on a situational assessment might be: "What impediments and strengths impact on the consumer's success in the community?" Situational assessment helps counselors and employment specialists to determine consumer preferences for particular job sites, as well as the specific types and level of supports necessary. The situational assessment must provide

information about the individual's ability to function in an on-site job training program leading to supported employment; need for on-going support services in order to perform competitive work; and ability to work in an integrated employment setting at the time of placement. Situational assessment for supported employment is distinctly different from facility or center-based assessments and traditional vocational evaluation because it:

- ◆ Utilizes competitive work settings in the community to gauge consumer strengths and needs;
- ◆ Produces performance results consistent with the work environment for which projections are being made;
- ◆ Utilizes standard supported employment training procedures on selected job factors.

Observation of a consumer's work performance in a competitive work environment, particularly where multiple job sites are used to assess different vocational interests and objectives, can address key questions the counselor might have about a consumer's work characteristics, interests, skills, abilities, and training needs. These key questions include:

- ◆ Does the individual seem to show a preference across job types?
- ◆ Does the individual work more effectively at specific times of the day?
- ◆ How long can the individual work without stopping for a break?
- ◆ Does the individual respond positively or negatively to factors in the environment (noise, movement, objects, people, and amount of space, etc.)?
- ◆ To what types and frequency of prompts does the individual respond best?

If necessary, the counselor should identify additional areas of information needed about the individual consumer that can be addressed during the situational assessment, such as:

- a. Strength and endurance;
- b. Challenging behaviors;
- c. Mobility (e.g., transfer safety to autos)
- d. Transportation needs/skills (e.g., move about in the home and at the work site safely), training/assistance require;
- e. Functional application of academic skills (e.g., reading, money use, telling time);
- f. Expressive and receptive communication skills.

The counselor can purchase situational assessment from any Employment Service Organization approved to provide the service.

### The Evaluation/Assessment Report

Following the completion of the situational assessment, the counselor will receive a detailed, informative report prepared by the vocational evaluator or employment specialist (see Situational Assessment report in Appendix D of Provider Agreement and in back of this manual). SE providers are required to complete the SE Form 1 (Situational Assessment Report) for situational assessments of DRS consumers. The information needed to be addressed on the form includes assessment information required by CARF. The range and

scope of the written report, whether it is a vocational evaluation or situational assessment report, should be sufficiently comprehensive to provide information concerning the following:

- ◆ Recommendations for a vocational goal;
- ◆ Type and level of supports needed at the job site;
- ◆ Individualized training needed to acquire and maintain acceptable production skills;
- ◆ Anticipated level of interventions that will be required by the employment specialist;
- ◆ Type of integrated work environment in which the supported worker can potentially succeed;
- ◆ Other information needed to develop an appropriate individualized employment plan, including the supported employee's interest in doing the job, transportation to and from work, family support, and financial issues (i.e., wage impact on Social Security benefits).

### Supplemental Information

The rehabilitation counselor should expand on the information being gathered by the evaluator or employment specialist through the situational assessment process by obtaining the following information:

- ◆ Residential setting involvement and implications for programming requirements;
- ◆ Family/caregiver support;
- ◆ Disincentives to working in the community;
- ◆ Effects of medication on functioning;
- ◆ Need for Psychosocial supports; and/or
- ◆ Consumer attitudes and preferences regarding work.

### IPE Requirements for Supported Employment

The rehabilitation counselor develops an Individualized Plan for Employment (Appendix B) with consumer involvement and in accordance with the policies and procedures specified in the *Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure Manual*. Certain specific information needs to be documented on the IPE developed for supported employment. Information that must be included on the initial IPE and/or subsequent amendments includes:

- ◆ Description of the training program and the related supports needed, including where, how, and when these supports will be provided;
- ◆ Identify the following:
  1. The extended services that are required after DRS terminates funding,
  2. Why these services are needed, and
  3. Who will provide and fund the extended services (long term follow along);
- ◆ If the counselor cannot identify the provider of long term follow along services at the time the IPE is developed, the IPE must include a statement explaining the basis for concluding there is a reasonable expectation that a source of extended services will be available. For example, "CSB funding is available in the individual's community to support long term follow along services;"
- ◆ Specific vocational goal that has been agreed upon between the consumer, rehabilitation counselor and

employment specialist;

- ◆ Planned or projected date (or number of months) for reaching employment goal;
- ◆ Description of ancillary services/support needed that will assist the consumer in obtaining and maintaining employment (rehabilitation engineering services, Personal Assistance Services, clothing, medication, psychotherapy, physical restoration services, etc.);
- ◆ Anticipated need for Post-Employment Services for Supported Employment; and
- ◆ Review of possible need for Rehabilitation Technology or PAS services in conjunction with SE services.

Supported Employment and Job Coach Training Services (JCTS) draw much of their effectiveness from the individualized approach of their program options and funding that reflect the needs of the individual. Funding should always be individualized to a consumer's specific need and demonstrated progress while receiving services.

### Factors that impact program selection, length, and design are:

- ◆ Type and severity of consumer disability;
- ◆ Motivation and job skills of consumer;
- ◆ Nature of service area (urban/rural) and employment market;
- ◆ Viability of the vocational goal;
- ◆ Experience and knowledge of counselor and employment specialist;
- ◆ Effectiveness of interagency communication and cooperation;
- ◆ Effectiveness of selection and planning committee in monitoring progress and problem solving.

Counselors should develop intermediate IPE objectives based on their projection of the extent to which these factors impact on individual consumer progress. The counselor should anticipate that the consumer's rate of progression through the different phases of job development, job placement, training, etc. may differ according to the consumer's disability. For example, data collected by DRS and VCU-RRTC on different disability groups often generalize in the following ways:

- ◆ Persons with most severe physical disabilities and serious mental illness may have more diverse vocational interests and aptitudes, and therefore spend longer time in job development than someone who has had little exposure to competitive work;
- ◆ Persons with serious mental illness tend to have the lowest rate of job retention; although they obtain higher wages in a wider range of types of employment, and require the shortest duration of DRS sponsorship;
- ◆ For persons in supported employment who have serious mental illness, the type, timing and location of interventions may differ from the types of support provided in supported employment to persons with other disabilities. For example, current research indicates that persons having serious mental illness can significantly reduce anxiety if supports are intensified 72 hours before they enter employment; and
- ◆ Persons with traumatic brain injury and dual diagnoses

require significantly higher on-site intensive intervention by the job coach or DRS employment specialist than other populations.

Still, a caution may be important here: the individual's characteristics and functional abilities must always be the determinant for goals, objectives and progress. Functional abilities may be more predictive than the diagnosis.

In critically assessing SE services and invoicing, as well as deciding to extend authorized hours on a particular case, the following is helpful to counselors:

- ◆ The training supports and behavioral techniques used by the employment specialist should decrease the consumer's dependency on the employment specialist;
- ◆ Supported employment services are designed to significantly increase earnings, work-related benefits, community integration, job security and mobility. These components, and goals specified in the IPE, should be utilized to gauge the success of the outcomes; and
- ◆ While the percentage of intervention time (and therefore hours requested) may initially be high, counselors should see this intervention time decline as a measure of progress. (Approximately 50 percent of all interventions are provided during the first four weeks of employment; 66 percent during the first 12 weeks of employment; and 90 percent in the first six months of employment.) The graph below illustrates this decline over time.

However, each consumer's case should be reviewed for individual consumer needs. Services may be provided with proper authorization and approval in compliance with the **Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure Manual**. Federal regulations specify that the maximum length of time for which SE services may be authorized is 18 months from the time of job placement, unless the IPE is amended based on the consumer needs. *The length of actual time for authorizing SE services should be based on the individual needs and progress of the consumer.* Exceptions to the 18-month limit require signatory approval from the Regional Director.

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## Additional IPE and IEP Requirements for Secondary Students

DRS recommends that students and their families begin to make transition plans at least three years prior to exiting school.

Chapter 8 of the **Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure Manual** states:

- ◆ Eligibility for Transition Services

- a. Definitions.

Transition services mean a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities

must be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and must include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Transition services must promote or facilitate the achievement of the employment goal identified in the student's DRS Employment Plan. (2001 federal regulation [34 CFR § 361.5](#) (b)(5)).

Student with a disability means those students with disabilities who are receiving special education services and students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services.

- b. Unless otherwise noted, procedures for coordinating, providing, or paying for transition services shall be consistent regardless of whether the individual is served by a local education agency, state operated program, or through the Comprehensive Services Act.
    - c. Appropriate referrals, DRS policies and procedures regarding application and eligibility shall apply.

Planning for supported employment services with secondary students should begin at least three years prior to the student exiting school, and should be consistent with the educational programming for the student.

Related services including rehabilitation counseling services must be identified on the transitioning components of the IEP as well as in the IPE.

The student's/consumer's long-range goal or desired outcome on the transition component of the IEP should be supported employment. If a student needs a particular related service in order to benefit from special education services, the related service professional should be involved in developing the IEP. The professional may be invited by the school or parent to join the IEP team as a person "with knowledge or special expertise" about the child.

Additional guidance on transitioning services for school students is found in Chapter 8 of the **Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure Manual**.

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## Additional IPE Requirements for Evidence Based Supported Employment for persons with Serious Mental Illness

The most effective method in arranging support services for persons with serious mental illness is a team approach. DRS sponsors vocationally oriented services to eligible consumers to seek, secure, and maintain employment. The consumer may, in addition, need therapeutic, residential, financial, and social supports like those provided concurrently by the clubhouse and the CSB.

- ◆ Evidence Based Supported Employment and support services that are jointly planned and provided to persons with serious mental illness by DRS, the CSB, and clubhouse should be documented on the IPE; and

- ◆ The IPE should specify responsibility for services provided both at the job site and off-site, as needed.

## Criteria for Assessing Job Stability and Closure

As the monthly progress reports and other measures of the consumer's progress indicate a reduction of intervention by the employment specialist (fading), the DRS counselor should monitor closely for indications of job stability. Services should then be geared toward maintaining production. "Stability" in employment is determined by the counselor, consumer and job coach once the following conditions are met.

Indicators of job stability are:

- ◆ Funding for extended employment has been secured. (LTFA Services have begun)
- ◆ Job coaching and related interventions have decreased to a level necessary to maintain the client in employment. Intervention has reached a plateau or leveled out. In some cases, the amount of intervention (i.e., time) onsite may not have decreased but the nature of the intervention has evolved to primarily maintenance.
- ◆ Client is emotionally or behaviorally stable.
- ◆ Client performs expected job duties.
- ◆ Supervisor reports satisfaction with client's job performance.
- ◆ Client is satisfied with the job and work environment.
- ◆ Necessary modifications and accommodations have been made at the worksite.
- ◆ Client has reliable transportation to and from work.
- ◆ Client is compensated at or above minimum wage but not less than the customary wage paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by people who do not have disabilities.
- ◆ For persons in the individual placement model, the average intervention time by the job coach has reached a maintenance level of support. The client/employee's needs have leveled off.
- ◆ In the individual model, once the consumer has been placed in employment, the DRS counselor moves the case from "Service" status to "employed" status based on the start date of the job. After 90 more days of employment, the case is eligible for closure and can then be successfully closed, if stability has been reached and all requirements are met for "Closed-Rehab" criteria.
- ◆ Once the case reaches stability, long term follow along funding begins. At this point, the DRS counselor should not fund any placement and training services unless more services are needed for job training. Employment maintenance services should be supported by long term follow along funds at this point, not DRS case service funds.
- ◆ Because the case must be in "employed" status at least 90 days before closure, long term follow along funding may or may not begin before case closure depending on the length of time the consumer needs placement and training services before reaching "stability". However, the application for long term follow along such as LTESS

funding must be completed and approved by the counselor before case closure.

For persons in group models, "stability" is defined as the completion of a 60 day period in which intervention is directed at maintaining a level of production and not at major barriers to successful integration into the job site. In other words, the job coach/trainer is devoting the majority of time addressing training issues rather than behavioral issues. The consumer is meeting a level of production that is acceptable to the employer (either the business or ESO itself). In addition, since an enclave/mobile crew supervisor is on-site at all times, intervention, (for the purpose of reporting on the SE Placement and Training form), is calculated at 100%. Once the placement and training services are no longer being provided, the case may be successfully closed once they have been employed for 90 days.

## Specific Counselor Responsibilities in Delivery of SE Services

Monitoring consumer progress towards job stabilization involves active participation by the counselor in obtaining information necessary to understand changes in the intervention schedule. The fading process is at times interrupted by more training and/or problem-solving that requires a more intensive intervention at the work site by the employment specialist. In such an event, the counselor should arrange for a staffing with the employment specialist and consumer if the consumer's progress seems questionable. The purpose of the staffing would be to problem-solve (and further determine whether continuation in this employment position is appropriate). Studies have shown that the greater the amount of communication between counselor and consumer, the greater chance the consumer has in succeeding on the job. In addition, the counselor should make every effort in visiting the consumer on the job to ensure that services are appropriate and that the consumer and employer are satisfied.

The rehabilitation counselor concludes funding of supported employment services when the consumer is stable in employment. It is important that the consumer be given the opportunity to demonstrate a clear pattern of "leveling" of job coach intervention. Again, in the individual model, while this may be less than 20 percent of the weekly hours in employment for at least 30 days prior to the movement of the case to DRS status "working", in specific cases, the percentage of time may be more. This may be the case after 30 days or may be extended longer, as needed, dependent on the individual consumer and job performance. The counselor should have firm documentation that the consumer is stable in employment prior to DRS closure and initiation of funding for extended services.

## Long-Term Follow Along/Extended Support Services

Extended support services, often referred to as long-term follow-along, commence upon stabilization in employment. For all populations these services consist mainly of ongoing job based support provided throughout the term of employment to enable the individual to maintain employment.

The DRS counselor has a responsibility for participating in the planning and delivery of extended support services. It is important that the DRS counselor remain informed during the delivery of extended support services for the purposes of documentation, and evaluation of services

In terms of best practices, this includes remaining informed of the consumer's progress and job status following case closure. While the DRS case is still open, the counselor should maintain direct contact with the consumer at and away from the job site and also receive the Ongoing Services Form (SE FORM 4) from the beginning of long term follow along until case closure from the employment specialist describing employer satisfaction and services being delivered.

# PART IV

## AUTHORIZING THROUGH USE OF SERVICE ITEM NUMBERS, IMPLEMENTING EXPENDITURE THRESHOLDS AND AGENCY FUND CODES

### Service Item Codes

This section describes how the counselor authorizes services using appropriate computerized coding information and funding criteria. Various Service Item Numbers are available to counselors when authorizing services within approved programs of SE, JCTS, and TEP. Applicable Service Items, which are listed in the *Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure Manual*, are identified and described below:

#### Service Item Codes

**A5101** SE Job Development Services

**A5103** Individual SE Placement and Training

**A5105** SE Group Placement and Training

**A5117** Entrepreneurial SE Placement and Training

### Supported Employment Services

**Definition:** These services are for persons who (a) have most severe/significant disabilities and who have three or more significant functional limitations; (b) who need multiple services over an extended period of time (c) will require post-closure follow-along support and funding in order to maintain employment; and (d) will be employed in job sites that meet the federal criteria for integrated settings.

### Situational Assessment

**Definition:** A service that utilizes competitive work settings, and not a facility-based setting, to gauge the strengths, deficits, and support needs of persons being considered for supported employment. This service produces an assessment of performance consistent with the environment for which authorization projections are made.

#### Service Item Number

**A6320** Situational Assessment — Individual

**A6322** Situational Assessment – Group – Daily Rate  
(Daily rate for enclaves and mobile work crews)

**A6321** Situational Assessment- Group Hourly Rate

### Job Coach Training Services (JCTS)

**Definition:** Services for persons who have severe disabilities and who need short-term, intensive on-site training by a job coach. These services do not constitute supported employment for coding purposes and should not be coded as such on DRS closure forms because (a) the individual is not targeted for extended services after DRS case closure or (b) the job site does not meet the federal criteria for supported employment.

### Authorization of Services

This section covers provider reporting expectations and authorizing guidance for counselors. This information is consistent with Appendix D, the evaluative and reporting sections of all supported employment provider agreements. These agreements are renewed annually. The information is also consistent with the *Virginia DRS Policy and Procedure*

#### Service Item Numbers

**A5132** JCTS Job Development Services

**A5134** Individual JCTS Placement and Training

**Manual.** Please refer to the Appendices at the end of the *Guide* for examples of reports.

Counselors should reference the *DRS Training and Facilities Manual* or the Employment Services Organization Directory on the DRS website to determine:

- ◆ Approved providers for supported employment;
- ◆ Specific, detailed program descriptions; and
- ◆ Provider rates.

### Situational Assessment

Past statewide data indicate that an average supported employment assessment is 16 hours. Included in this averaging of hours is face-to-face contact with the consumer, writing reports, and time transporting the consumer to the job sites. This is an average and should not limit consumers receiving services that require more than 16 hours of assessment time.

Following the completion of situational assessment the counselor will receive a detailed, informative report prepared by the vocational evaluator or employment specialist. Components of the assessment which give rise to the data used in the written report include: number and type of work sites, types of jobs performed, number of hours per work site, and types and extent of training prompts utilized. The range and scope of the written report, whether it is a vocational evaluation or situational assessment report, should be sufficiently comprehensive to provide information concerning the following:

- ◆ Type and level of supports needed at the job site;
- ◆ Individualized training needed to acquire and maintain acceptable production skills;
- ◆ Anticipated level of interventions that will be required by the employment specialist;
- ◆ Integrated work environment in which the supported worker can potentially succeed; and

- ◆ Other information needed to develop an appropriate individualized employment plan, including the supported employee's interest in doing the job, transportation to and from work, family support, and financial issues (i.e., wage impact on Social Security benefits).

The ESO is responsible for developing sites for situational assessments. Generally, the DRS counselor does not pay for the time spent in developing a site. However, for consumers that may require a site with narrow specifications that is not easily found in the community, the DRS counselor may negotiate with the employment specialist the hours needed to develop such a site. This should only occur rarely and on an individual basis. In addition, the ESO is required to have sufficient liability insurance for covering the consumer on the SA site.

## **Job Development**

The length and the cost of pre-placement authorizations are dictated by specific consumer goals as stated in the IPE, and the planned strategies developed by the counselor, consumer, and employment specialist. The number of hours needed to develop a supported employment placement will vary. The counselor should request and obtain progress information monthly from the employment specialist during the job development process through written reports containing the following:

- ◆ Name, number and type of employers contacted;
- ◆ Job development strategies applied;
- ◆ Job development hours utilized;
- ◆ Potential placement possibilities or outcomes expected; and
- ◆ Additional job development hours requested for the following month.

## **Placement and Training**

Counselors should review each consumer's needs and authorize services accordingly. However, federal regulations prohibit counselors from authorizing these services for longer than 18 months from the time of job placement, unless the IPE is amended based on consumer needs. It should also be noted that the approval by the Regional Director is needed to extend services beyond 18 months. It is important that the counselor closely monitor consumer progress.

During the period of DRS authorized services, the employment specialist must submit monthly reports of consumer progress to the rehabilitation counselor along with invoices for services provided. The reports needed for Situational Assessment, Job Development, Placement and Training and Ongoing Services are all found on the DRS website. The counselor should document the need for reauthorizing additional services based on counselor observation and the monthly reports containing the following information:

- Original employment objectives;
- Job description and worker responsibilities;

- Type and level of training;
- Adaptations for employment site;
- Strengths/Concerns/Proposed Solutions;
- Intervention hours utilized (current month);
- Intervention hours requested (next month); and
- Degree of job stabilization achieved to date.

## **Service Authorization**

Currently for job development and placement and training services, DRS counselors use a "zero balance" method in authorizing and tracking services. In other words, based on negotiations with the employment specialist, the counselor authorizes a specific number of hours for services each month. If the hours are not used, the remainder is canceled and reauthorized for the following month. If more hours are needed than originally authorized, additional hours are authorized by the counselor after negotiations with the job coach.

## **Expectations Governing Billing and Reporting**

Employment specialists provide brief monthly written progress reports on each consumer. These reports, available on the DRS website, should accompany monthly invoice sheets. Counselors may ask to review intervention sheets or case notes. Situational Assessments requires the use of SE Form 1. Job development requires the use of SE Form 2. Placement and Training requires the use of SE Form 3. Ongoing Services require the use of SE Form 4. General billing activities can be divided into four categories:

- ◆ **Work site activities** - includes travel, training and intervention with consumer, employer, and employees at work site. In certain situations billable travel time may be negotiated between the DRS counselor and the ESO. An example is: in some parts of Virginia traffic results in higher travel times. This may be a time when billable travel time is negotiated.
- ◆ **Job development activities** - includes consumer specific job development with employers, supervisors, and other personnel for purposes directly related to employment.
- ◆ **Off-site activities** - includes training in transportation, money handling, and advocacy for persons not directly affiliated with the work site.
- ◆ **Assessment/Report Writing** - includes provision of situational assessment services and all task analysis, training and progress report writing.

DRS pays only for the actual time spent providing services. For example, phone calls to consumers are not to be billed at an artificial minimum time but for the actual time talking to the consumer. Likewise, services are to be prorated when appropriate. For example, if an employment specialist visits an employer and discusses four consumers, then the cost of that visit is divided by four and the appropriate portion is

reflected in each consumer service billing.

### **Non Billable Services**

DRS consider administrative functions of the employment specialists and ESO management as non-billable since time spent in these functions are factored into the ESO's hourly rates. Examples of administrative functions are as follows:

- Time spent by ESO management supervising employment specialists, consulting with them about cases and performing internal case reviews.
- Time spent completing and sending a request for service hours.
- Time spent in preparing a bill (not a report) for services.
- Time spent in marketing ESO services.

### **Explanation of Fund Codes**

Various Agency Fund Codes are applicable to authorizing SE, JCTS and TEP services. Primary Agency Fund Codes and their appropriate use are as follows:

1. **SE Funds:** Use this Federal Title VI-B supported employment funds to purchase direct and ancillary services for persons who meet all of the criteria for supported employment.
2. **Basic VR Funds:** Use this code only after all SE Fund codes are fully encumbered or otherwise unavailable.

The counselor should use Basic VR Funds in authorizing Job Coach Training Services when there is a need for short term intensive on-site training and the consumer will not require post-closure follow-along.

### **LTESS (Long-term Employment Support Services) Funds**

In 1994, members of VA ACCSES approached the General Assembly requesting funds for long-term follow-along services. The organization cited specific numbers of consumers across the state of Virginia in need of support for both long-term follow-along in Supported Employment and long-term follow-along for Extended Sheltered Employment Services. LTESS funds are not disability specific in that it may support long-term follow along services for any consumer that is regarded as having a most significant disability by DRS. Funds have been appropriated annually since that time. Employment Service Organizations approved for SE and EES (facility based) services were given equal portions of the total appropriated to be used for long-term support. Reallocations in subsequent years have been determined in a variety of fashions, including based on utilization in previous years. The Division of Rehabilitative Services was identified by the General Assembly as the administrative agent. By policy, all LTESS applications should be approved by a DRS counselor and the approval documented in the consumer's file prior to submission to the DRS Office of Employment Services and Special Programs.

LTESS funds support ongoing vocational support services that are necessary and sufficient for consumers to maintain

employment. Job training or retraining are not considered job maintenance services so these services are not to be billed to LTESS funds. Likewise, case management, independent living or other services that are not vocational in nature should not be billed to LTESS funds. Per the Code of Virginia, LTESS funds are not appropriated by the General Assembly to fund those services.

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### **Job Loss and Job Upgrade after DRS Case Closure**

When a consumer loses a job (especially when it is not their fault, for example, due to layoff), the rehabilitation counselor should take a new referral if substantial vocational rehabilitation services are required. Supported employment services can be re-initiated for a former consumer in instances of job destabilization or potential upgrade. A consumer need not lose their job before receiving additional intervention or job development services.

### **Availability of Long-Term Follow-Along Services**

This section describes traditional and innovative methods of securing funding for long term follow along services.

Utilization of SE by DRS counselors occurs primarily through fee-for-service agreements with provider agencies such as rehabilitation facilities; Community Service Board operated programs, agencies specializing in supported employment, job coach training services and transitional employment programs. Agreements with provider organizations involve the following funding arrangements:

1. DRS purchases job placement and intensive job site training and support (commonly referred to as DRS time limited services) until the supported employee is stable in employment; and
2. An agency other than DRS purchases or provides support services designed to maintain the worker in employment after completion of DRS funding.

Some funding sources for long term follow along services in supported employment are disability specific. For persons with serious mental illness and mental intellectual disabilities, services may be funded or provided directly by the local CSB.

Practitioners of supported employment services nationwide are utilizing increasingly diversified funding sources to provide monetary support for extended services. As noted above, in Virginia the primary sources of funding for extended services are the CSB converted day activity funds. Some examples of other potential funding sources being developed and utilized in Virginia and/or nationally are listed below:

- ♦ Social Security Incentives: Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS) and Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE); Ticket to Work (TTW)
- ♦ SSA Ticket to Work
- ♦ Employer, consumer, family contributions;

- ◆ Provider/facility (ex: production or donated goods revenues);
- ◆ Local public funds;
- ◆ Private Insurance carrier reimbursement;
- ◆ General State revenues;
- ◆ Charitable/Foundation funds (i.e., United Way).

Natural supports are a rapidly developing strategy for increasing consumer involvement and inclusion. Pilot studies

are also demonstrating cost reduction. This cost reduction increases the longer the person remains employed.

Natural supports occur when individuals other than the job coach (for example, co-workers, supervisors, parents, bus drivers, or significant others) provide needed and appropriate supports. The employment specialist often interacts in more of a consultant role by teaching others appropriate and sensitive intervention, support functions, and monitoring those supports.

## **PART V**

### **SOCIAL SECURITY WORK INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT**

#### **Program Description (For 2015)**

For the purpose of this information, it will be assumed that the reader has the basic knowledge of the Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefit programs and their respective eligibility and continuing eligibility requirements. For a more complete description of SSA eligibility requirements, see the SSA publications: *Understanding SSI, A Guide to SSI for Groups and Organizations, Disability* and the *Red Book on Employment Support*. Also, information may be obtained at “the work site” at [www.ssa.gov/work](http://www.ssa.gov/work) and the Red Book site at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) by looking under “Disability” then “Publications.” Please review the information contained in the Red Book regarding Subsidy, Impairment Related Work Expenses, Earned Income and General Income Exclusions, 1619 (a), 1619 (b), and PASS procedures for complete and thorough explanations of those incentives. This chapter is meant to serve as a guide, not as definitive explanations.

Earning a wage will impact beneficiaries of the Title II Programs: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or and Childhood Disability Benefits (CDB) and recipients of the Title XVI Program-Supplemental Security Income (SSI) - differently. It is suggested that any person wishing to assist themselves or others be familiar with the basic effects and rules of earned and/or unearned income on the benefits of these programs and how these programs overlap for individuals who are, or can become, eligible for both. It is also suggested that you work with the individual’s Social Security Employment Support Representative or a claims representative whenever rendering advice on SSA regulations to validate that advice. The following are definitions of the Social Security disability programs.

- ◆ SSDI/CDB are entitlement programs for individuals who have either worked for enough time paying Social Security taxes or who receive a benefit from their parent/legal guardian who paid Social Security taxes.
- ◆ CDB is a benefit received by an individual who became disabled before age 22 and who has a parent/step-parent who earned SSA benefits who is now deceased, retired, or disabled. Individuals must meet earned income and disability tests for eligibility and continuing eligibility. SSDI and CDB will be referred to as SSDI in this text.
- ◆ SSI is a program based on financial need and disability. Individuals must meet disability, earned and unearned income and resource tests for eligibility. For continuing eligibility individuals must continue to meet disability, unearned income and

resource tests. Earned income, however, may go above the initial eligibility level and the individual may continue eligibility.

- ◆ Medicare is associated with SSDI and is administered by SSA.
- ◆ Medicaid is associated with SSI and, in Virginia, is administered by Social Services.
- ◆ The SSDI benefit amount is determined by the extent and frequency of past earned income on which Social Security taxes were paid, sometimes referred to as FICA tax. The more one earns (or was earned by the person through whom a person qualifies), the higher the monthly benefit amount.
- ◆ The maximum SSI amount for which an individual or couple qualifies is called the Federal Benefit Rate (FBR). The maximum FBR depends on the individual’s marital status and living arrangements. The SSI benefit check amount is based on the individual/couple FBR which is reduced by the amount of his/her countable income.

#### **Work Incentives**

People currently receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) have various work incentives that are designed to assist them in obtaining or returning to gainful employment. These work incentives are complex and can overlap, depending on the individual, their needs, and/or their occupational goal.

The following outlines the utilization of work incentives for those individuals who choose to work and earn income. Again, the practitioner must have a thorough understanding of the effects of work on SSDI and SSI, and of the continuing eligibility criteria for each of these programs. This information must be validated through the individual’s SSDI/SSI Employment Support or claims representative(s) and fully communicated to the individual and family members prior to placement and prior to using the work incentives.

All information given is assuming that the individual receiving SSDI and/or SSI has not medically recovered and would meet and continue to meet all eligibility guidelines for the program under which that work incentive falls (SSDI/SSI).

#### **Social Security Disability Insurance**

If an individual who has received only Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for more than one year goes to work the following applies.

## **Trial Work Period (SSDI)**

When the individual becomes SSDI eligible the beneficiary begins a Trial Work Period (TWP). Technically this is not of concern until the individual begins paid work. This period consists of nine months (not necessarily consecutive) during which there is no limit on the amount of earned income and therefore benefits continue.

For every month earned income exceeds \$780 (for the year 2015) or you work more than 80 self-employed hours in a month, a TWP month is counted. You continue counting these TWP months until the individual has worked for nine months earning over \$780/month (within a 60-month period of time). For example, you locate a position for an individual entering data onto a computer. He works five months earning \$800 per month (this amount is more than \$780 and therefore each month is counted as a TWP month). For the next three months contract work is low, hours for new workers are reduced, and he earns \$195 per month (these are not TWP months).

The workload increases and for the next four months he earns \$900 per month (these are TWP months). He has completed his TWP with nine months of earned income over \$780/month within any 60-month period of time. He received his SSDI check for the entire 12 months he was in the TWP. Work incentives are not applicable during the trial work period.

## **Grace Period**

The grace period begins upon completion of the TWP in the first month where an individual earns more than substantial gainful activity. The grace period is completed when a person earns more than gainful activity for three months (not necessarily consecutive) following the TWP. The individual is entitled to their SSDI for these three additional months following the TWP regardless of earnings.

## **Extended Period of Eligibility (SSDI)**

After an individual has used his TWP, the next month he enters the Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE). The EPE lasts for a minimum of 36 months. During this time an individual may have a benefit cessation which is based on a minimum of three months of earned income averaging over Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA), in 2015 usually over \$1,090 per month for individuals with disabilities other than blind. (SGA for SSDI beneficiaries who are blind is \$1,820.)

Once a benefit cessation has occurred during the EPE, an individual will qualify to receive SSDI benefits only in months where earned income is below SGA. Reporting earnings and applying work incentives is mandatory to avoid over/under payments during this time and this reporting should be in writing with copies kept.

When reported earnings fluctuate between over and under SGA the individual should receive the benefit for the

months under SGA and not receive it for the months over. The end of the EPE is determined by the individual's earned income and use of work incentives and may last longer than the minimum of 36 months (this is a brief explanation). If an individual has had an SGA cessation and is earning over SGA the 36th month, then he/she would be terminated from SSDI eligibility the 37th month if earning over SGA. Medicare continues through EPE periods. Medicare coverage will last at least 93 months after the Trial Work Period ends.

## **Subsidy (SSDI)**

A work incentive, which has direct ties to supported employment, is subsidy. Additional training, support, or supervision supplied to an individual by the job coach, a volunteer, or employer that is above and beyond that supplied to an employee in a similar position without a disability is a subsidy.

A subsidy is calculated by the additional time in hours per month these "extras" are given multiplied by the wage of the supported employee. This amount is not counted in the SGA determination. A subsidy may enable an individual to become eligible for SSDI (not working or working but earning less than SGA).

Many supported employees have unnecessarily lost their SSDI benefits because subsidy was not claimed or verified by the job coach or employer.

There are other subsidies where employers may incur additional expenses in supporting an individual on a job through providing supervision or services, allowing a slower rate of speed or fewer duties, and/or purchasing items to accommodate the individual.

## **Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) for the SSDI Beneficiary**

Like subsidy, Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) can be used in the SGA determination that may enable an individual to remain in the EPE and avoid a premature SSDI eligibility termination. Impairment Related Work Expenses are expenses incurred by the individual with a listed disability that enable him to work. They must be paid by the individual in a month in which he is working and not be reimbursed by any other source. IRWEs are frequently used when an individual needs to purchase SE extended services.

For the SSDI beneficiary, paying for some of his own SE services out of his earnings may enable him to continue to receive his benefit. His SSDI benefit amount does not change; he either receives it all or does not receive any.

Reporting and documentation for proof of IRWE payment must be provided to SSA in writing with a record kept of the report being sent. Agencies need to establish policies for cost-sharing or other methods to fund services and billing/collection procedures to enable individuals to have a stake in ownership of services

Additional IRWE examples frequently used are payments for special transportation for individuals who cannot drive or use public transportation; medications required to control or alleviate a disabling condition; or payments for assistive technology devices. The SSA publication Red Book on Work Incentives contains an extensive section on various items and services that are/are not deductible as IRWEs.

## **Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Work Incentives**

Unlike the SSDI Program (where the working individual receives all or none of the SSDI benefit amount depending on earned income), in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program, the SSI benefit amount is calculated on a formula through which a person's SSI is (usually) gradually reduced or increased in accordance with decreases and increases in other income.

Each year the Federal Benefit Rate (FBR) is established January 1, which is the maximum amount the individual/eligible couple may receive in their benefit. The maximum SSI amount is determined by the individual's marital status and living arrangements. To remain eligible for any work incentive program, the individual must remain eligible in all ways for the SSA program under which those work incentives fall. SSI individuals who later qualify for CDB or SSDI may lose SSI eligibility entirely if they qualify for this and/or another unearned income benefit which is at an amount too high for eligibility. (SSI recipients with a parent (or a second parent) approaching retirement or who become disabled or deceased, need to be aware of this.) The following applies:

### **Earned Income and General Exclusions (SSI)**

For individuals with no unearned income, the first \$85/month of earned income does not reduce their SSI benefit amount. If an individual has unearned income such as SSDI, the first \$20 of unearned income is excluded and the first \$65 of the earned income is excluded. The earned income remaining after the earned income exclusion is subtracted is divided by two, thus for every \$2 earned by the SSI recipient, the benefit amount is reduced by \$1.

The balance of the countable earned income and/or unearned income after exclusion(s) is then subtracted from the individual's FBR to determine the SSI benefit amount. An individual's SSI benefit amount may fluctuate from zero up to the Federal Benefit Rate for which they qualify. Reporting of earned and unearned income to the SSI claims representative is necessary to avoid over or under payments. (For persons who also have SSDI, a report must also be made to that claims representative.)

### **1619(b) (SSI)**

1619(b) is an important link to the SSI system. If your SSI cash benefits were to stop due to your earned income (wages) or a combination of earned and unearned income, you will still be considered an SSI recipient as long as you would otherwise be eligible for benefits if not for your income. Usually, SSI benefit eligibility will terminate if you do not receive a cash payment within a twelve (12 ) month period. Because you would be otherwise eligible for benefits if not for your income, your cash benefits can be reinstated without a new application if your income falls below SSI levels. In addition, 1619(b) will protect your Medicaid eligibility even if you are not eligible for a cash benefit. You must meet the following criteria to qualify for 1619(b).

- 1) Still have a disability
- 2) Need the coverage to pay expenses that allow you to work
- 3) Accumulate no more than \$2000 in resources
- 4) Earn less than \$34,543 gross per calendar year (2015 figure). Some people can still qualify using an individualized threshold if they have high medical expenses
- 5) Have been eligible for SSI cash benefits for at least one month

Eligibility for 1619(b) must be screened and approved by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Department of Social Services (DSS).

### **Subsidy (SSI)**

Subsidy applies to the SSI program only in assisting in establishing initial eligibility- working but earning less than Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) for individuals with disabilities other than blind. (SGA does not apply to SSI individuals who are blind.) Subsidy is determined for SSI in assisting with eligibility in the same manner as for SSDI.

## **Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) for SSI Recipients**

The definition of Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) for SSI is the same as for SSDI. The difference is in the effect its use has on the SSI benefit amount because of the manner in which the SSI benefit is calculated. The amount of the IRWE is excluded from earned income only, after the exclusion(s) are subtracted and before the balance of earned income is divided by half.

In effect, the individual's SSI benefit amount can be increased by up to 50 percent of the cost of the IRWE — up to the individual's FBR — the net effect of an up to 50 percent reimbursement of these costs by SSI.

IRWE expenses must be reported and documentation of payment must be provided to SSA. IRWEs are not time-limited and may be used as long as required by the individual because of his/her disability to maintain employment.

## **Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) (SSI)**

The Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) (or more self-support) is a work incentive that is exclusively associated with SSI. Individuals must be eligible for SSI (excluding the resources and income to be put in the PASS). However, an individual that receives SSDI may become eligible for SSI through the use of a PASS. The recipient should discuss this with their SSA Employment Support Representative. Subsidies and IRWEs may assist in meeting the earned income eligibility requirements for SSI. The PASS is a way for an SSI recipient to achieve an occupational goal that requires money for services or items. PASS plans must be written and formally submitted to and approved by SSA before they can be used. SSA's goal for a PASS is to encourage the recipient to become less dependent on SSI benefits.

An individual may write a PASS for a vocational evaluation or situational assessment to determine a feasible occupational goal. They may be written to pay for educational expenses, occupational behavioral intervention training, training of independent living skills required in the work environment, uniforms, items, and/or equipment required to meet an occupational goal. PASS plans can also now be written, in some cases, to assist an individual in maintaining employment where their position would be in jeopardy without this assistance. Some examples of occupational goals for PASS to pay for Supported Employment would be:

- ◆ To become a computer data entry operator achieving a speed of 60 WPM with 100 percent accuracy;
- ◆ To become a kitchen utility worker to a level of independence which requires no more than five hours of SE support per month; or
- ◆ To become the owner/operator of a small business in country crafts to the level of \$1,000 profit per month.

It is important to remember that once the occupational goal is achieved then the PASS is terminated. Therefore, it is always important to include a goal of anticipated achievement/independence to be reached prior to the conclusion of the PASS. The PASS is time limited and must be related to helping the individual achieve a specific occupational goal.

In the SSI calculation, an SSI pre-approved PASS amount of earned and/or unearned income is excluded when determining the SSI benefit amount. (Resource amounts to be included are a separate calculation for SSI eligibility, however, are written into the PASS formal plan as planned expenditures.) A PASS can be set up to save or use money monthly to purchase something outright, and to make monthly installment payments, and/or to pay off a loan.

PASS plans are very flexible and can pay for almost anything related to an occupational goal. Remember:

1. A PASS candidate must have resources or source(s) of income other than SSI. He cannot use SSI money in a PASS.
2. A PASS candidate must receive or be eligible to receive SSI [Unearned income or resources used in a PASS or IRWE expenses (included in the working individual's PASS and/or excluded from earned income) or Subsidies may enable the recipient to become eligible for SSI].
3. A PASS (unless also meeting the definition of an IRWE) does not change SGA earned income guidelines associated with SSDI for persons on SSI/SSDI.
4. A PASS does not change income and resource guidelines associated with SSI, other than excluding money designated for the PASS, only during the term of the PASS. (If unearned income is too high at the end of the PASS or if resources designated are not used during the PASS so that the person is above the resource limit at the conclusion of the PASS then the person will no longer be eligible for SSI/Medicaid.)
5. A PASS can only be used to achieve a specific occupational goal that must be realistic and clearly stated in measurable terms that determine when the goal is met. Payment for more than one item or service can be written into a PASS.
6. A PASS is a time-limited work incentive and must be written for a specific time frame. It must be approved by the SSA and will be periodically monitored.
7. Receipts or proof of payment will need to be available to the individual's SSI claims representative(s) as required. Work incentives must be monitored. SSA strongly recommends that, especially in cases where amounts are saved toward an occupational goal, PASS monies be maintained in

a separate bank account that is used only for PASS savings and withdrawals for PASS payments.

## **PASS and IRWE**

PASS and IRWE are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As denoted in the PASS example, some expenditures could be considered under both programs, i.e., paying for an employment specialist toward achieving an occupational goal. In the PASS example, the expense was used as an IRWE for the SSDI-SGA test and in the SSI calculation as a PASS, for full reimbursement of expenses. In paying for SE to achieve an occupational goal, a PASS could be used for a specific time frame. At the conclusion of the PASS the expense of SE could be used as an IRWE in the SSI calculation in some cases (a person with SSDI above the unearned income break-even point will not remain SSI eligible at the end of the PASS).

Other expenses would only qualify for a PASS or an IRWE. The purchase of a car to use in transportation to achieve the goal of: "To become a Kitchen Utility Worker at the level of performance of 100 percent of all essential job functions" would only qualify as a PASS because it is not "impairment related." The car modification expenses of installing hand controls for an individual who is an accountant and because of injury is now unable to use his legs would only qualify as an IRWE because the individual has already achieved his occupational goal: accountant. When either PASS or IRWE could be used for SSI recipients, it is usually in the individual's financial interest to use the PASS time limit first, followed by the IRWE.

## **PASS, IRWE, and Supported Employment**

An individual may be found ineligible for rehabilitation services due to not requiring or being able to benefit from services. If the individual or family members feel that he/she should be eligible for rehabilitation services and supported employment then a PASS may be used for a supplemental vocational evaluation. It could include situational assessments, and/or assistive technology assessments toward establishing a feasible occupational goal. These assessments may provide evidence of vocational potential, thus qualifying the individual for rehabilitation services.

Using State or Federal dollars for SE services requires that before Rehabilitation SE services can be initiated, available extended services must be identified. An individual may be found eligible for rehabilitation services, however, may be informed that these services cannot be initiated because an extended service provider cannot be identified.

The rehabilitation counselor will then work to determine an extended service provider. However the individual may not qualify for community or other service provision or may be eligible for community or other services, which have a waiting list for SE service provision. The individual/SSA named payee may elect to identify the use

of a PASS or IRWE for method of payment for extended services. In the Individual's Plan for Employment, the rehabilitation counselor would document the PASS and/or IRWE amount as the resource for services, delineate the services, and name the provider of those services and monitoring provisions to be used to account for progress and achievement of the occupational objective. The rehabilitation counselor would then be able to provide the initial funding of SE services.

PASS and IRWEs may also be used in a variety of ways in conjunction with supported employment to provide related services or access related needs. Both work incentives may be utilized to pay for services such as co-payment or full payment of extended SE services, special transportation, assistive technology required on the job or in getting ready for work, personal care services required on the job or in getting ready for work, and etc.

Someone with SSDI above the unearned income break-even point can develop a PASS plan to pay for a vocational evaluation and/or situational assessment to determine an occupational goal and later develop another PASS to achieve an occupational goal through SE services. The PASS could exclude SSDI, making the recipient eligible for SSI during the term of the PASS. The second PASS could also exclude earned income, making the recipient eligible for a higher SSI benefit up to their Federal Benefit Rate during the term of the PASS. The cost of SE services is used to bring earnings below SGA for continued SSDI benefits (costs of vocational evaluation and situational assessments are not IRWEs as the individual is not working during the assessments).

Once working, an individual may earn money exceeding SGA, if this occurs before the PASS has ended, the individual may lose their SSDI benefit. This may allow him/her to maintain SSI eligibility at the end of the PASS (if earnings exceed SGA after the extended services costs and subsidies are subtracted from the gross earned income). With SSI eligibility maintained at the end of the second PASS, the individual may be eligible for 1619(b) extended Medicaid coverage if earnings reach the earned income break-even point. This is often desirable because of the SSI program flexibility for the individual to achieve higher earned income up to the state threshold amount enabling him/her to maintain SSI and Medicaid.

Using the same example, but with the individual using an IRWE to pay for his own extended services is another creative solution. However this will only work after the individual has lost his SSDI benefit. An IRWE would not enable an individual with an SSDI benefit higher than the unearned income break-even point to maintain SSI. The IRWE can be used for SSI purposes when the PASS is complete. Monies spent on paying for the IRWE, extended services could be excluded from the earned income in the SSI calculation.

Remember that PASS can exclude earned or unearned income; whereas IRWE can only be used to exclude

earned income. Thus, as IRWE only effects earned income, and it cannot enable an individual with SSDI higher than the unearned income break-even point to maintain SSI eligibility.

Careful consideration should be used when planning the utilization of PASS and/or IRWE work incentives. There are many situations that can adversely affect the individual receiving SSI and/or SSDI disability benefits.

The general rule of thumb mandates that you consult with your local SSA office to determine applicability and feasibility, on a case by case basis. SSA will determine whether an item or service is an IRWE for that individual and will review and approve/disapprove/modify PASS plans for that individual. With knowledge and adequate record keeping/documentation, SSA work incentives can be an invaluable resource to individuals with disabilities and service providers.

It is imperative that the employer be notified that the SE service provider must be contacted when he/she receives a questionnaire from SSA as their supports need to be included on that report. It is also important that the job coach assist the employer in identifying the modifications or accommodations that he/she provides to the individual. A simple statement by the employer such as, "It takes Robert eight hours to perform the job that I could do in six." denotes an employer subsidy that he/she may never think to write on the earned income and/or work activity questionnaire.

Note: This is an in-brief explanation. For more specifics and clarifications, please see your local Social Security Administration Employment Support or Claims Representative regarding each individual case that you deem may be a possibility for a work incentive.

Adequate ability to report and keep records of expenditures for services/items purchased and earned/unearned income and ability to adequately respond to and keep records of SSA correspondence/inquires and documentation of your responses is mandatory. Thousands of individuals in supported employment unnecessarily or prematurely lose their benefits and/or are charged with overpayments and/or are underpaid. This is often due to lack of knowledge of the SSA disability benefit programs and work incentives to include subsidies, IRWEs and PASS and/or lack of reporting and documentation.

## Student Earned Income Exclusion

The student earned income exclusion is for students who are on SSI that are working. Under the SEIE, Social Security will not count up to \$1,780 per month of the student's wages up to a maximum of \$7,180 per year. To qualify, the student must be under age 22, in college for at least eight hours a week, in grades 7-12 for 12 hours a week, or in a job training program for 15 hours a week.

## Medicaid Works

Medicaid works is a Medicaid program administered by the local Departments of Social Services that allows individuals with disabilities to get or retain Medicaid coverage despite having higher income and resources than allowed under the "traditional" Medicaid program. In order to qualify for Medicaid works, the applicant must be disabled, working (or can prove when work will begin) and be between the ages of 16 and 65. For initial eligibility, a person cannot have an income higher than \$785 per month. Resources cannot exceed \$2,000 if single or \$3,000 per couple. Once eligibility in Medicaid works is approved, income limits increase to \$75,000 per year. Resources increase to \$34,543.

## Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), can reduce the tax liability for the year for certain low-income individuals. The amount of money an individual can earn and still claim the credit varies depending on filing status and number of dependents. The number of dependents also determines the amount of the credit. The greater the number of dependents, the higher the credit is.

## Individual Development Accounts (IDA's)

An IDA is a matched savings account that allows low-income individuals to put earned income aside into a special account to save for the purchase of items that need. These could include starting a business, buying a home, and paying for education to name a few. For individuals who receive SSI, earned income put into the IDA will not count against their SSI. Because the IDA reduces the amount of money that Social Security counts, recipients of SSI will see their benefits increase. Money that is set aside into an IDA also does not count as resources for programs such as food stamps and Medicaid.

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ABLE Accounts