

## **Employment Workgroup Update**

March 2016

### **Summary**

Over the last year we have outlined and reviewed the employment Quality Improvement initiative options and have studied ways to improve the proportion of I/DD adults who are interested in finding employment. We know statistically there are more than 42% of the I/DD population who would like to be employed. Unfortunately in looking at the various resource options, there hasn't been any of the directed or mandated ways we look for work that have significantly improved the chances of these individuals finding work.

The workgroup was interested in finding a way to focus on a single thread, such as websites and develop a more user friendly set of instructions to make them more accessible. Unfortunately after going through four (4) websites it was determined three of those were very ineffective or early in their development and very hard to use. They also had very few jobs listed. One site which is under abilities work.employ Florida has a number of employers who are posting jobs for persons with disabilities. They do not differentiate between I/DD, therefore making it more difficult to zero in on a specific applicable job. However the website did have a good cross-section of companies using it. I have talked with a number of supported employment coaches, as well as personal supports providers to discuss what their experiences have been with employment. I also spoke with Vocational Rehabilitation to better understand their process.

### **Issues**

The various issues that impact finding and retaining jobs are as follows:

1. **Websites:** With the exception of the website abilities work.employ Florida, we didn't find a website to could accomplish what we were looking for. In talking to a cross-section of supported employment coaches I didn't find any were using websites to find jobs for the individuals they are supporting. Therefore to make a website more usable there would have to be better more user friendly websites with potential some education or direction from APD.
2. **Earnings impact on benefits:** Another deterrent is the relative lack of understanding among individuals receiving services and providers as to earnings limitations that could impact Social Security and med waiver benefits. There is some training in place to help in this process. The issue still remains there is a limited number of part-time jobs posted on the primary website and full time employment could impact benefits.
3. **Job search:** For the most part the job search process is mostly a network based local search taking place with and through various support providers or family.

### **Recommendation:**

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** is a broad service that can assist individuals with disabilities in the quest for employment. For the most part, VR is not equipped for I/DD population based on

our experiences. VR is a very slow process starting with obtaining the first appointment then going through the acceptance which includes a psychiatric evaluation and then further testing. E.g. I have a consumer who started this process last November and has another appointment on March 11, but still has not been assigned to an employment agency to do the actual job search. In the meantime, he has been home every day using personal supports and has no meaningful day activity. He is fully capable of working and wants to earn money. In this case, I was able to use my network to find him a job at a university where he will be starting as a dishwasher in the next week.

2. **The best way to find jobs** is to use the resources of a supported employment coach who has a network and is paid by the hour to help stimulate and expedite the process. This currently cannot happen within the initial requirement of using Vocational Rehabilitation services for phase 1.

3. **Next steps:** It would be desirable to have an open discussion at the next Quality Council meeting to determine whether we can make the VR an option instead of a mandated direction. If this means policy or statutes must be modified then we suggest this to be considered. Based on various interviews personalized service is the only way to expedite and improve the success of early job placement. It is unfortunate we are allowing many of available workers to not be able to fulfill their goals to have desired employment.

Don Welde  
[904-477-4838](tel:904-477-4838)