

# Interagency employment key messages

## Goal

To support the development of consistent person-centered messages across our agencies to help people understand expectations about work for people with disabilities.

## Audiences

- People with disabilities who are currently not working, or are working in a segregated setting and/or being paid subminimum wages
- Guardians and families of people with disabilities
- Support professionals

## Source

Original draft developed by the Joint Communications Interagency Work group, which included representatives from DHS, DSD, DEED, VRS and MDE-Special Ed.

## Input and review process

- Disability Hub MN's Virtual Insight Panel
  - People with disabilities (41 people)
  - Guardians and families (20 people)
- Employment Learning Community (ELC)
- Interagency Employment Panel (IAEP)
  - MDE Special Education Director
  - DEED VRS Director
  - DHS DSD Director
- Metro County Employment Workgroup
- Regional Resource Specialists

## How to use the key messages

The following key messages can be used as is or adapted as needed for print or electronic formats.

# Key messages for people with disabilities

## Why the focus on employment in the community?

### Employment in the community is an option for everyone.

- In the past, many people with disabilities worked in a separate setting meant only for people with disabilities — often doing routine jobs for less than minimum wage.
- Today, more people with disabilities are choosing employment in the community, alongside people without disabilities.
- You can get help to find a job that matches your skills and interests.

### Employment in the community has many benefits.

- When you work in the community, you have more choices and opportunities.
- You can develop new skills and become more independent.
- You'll likely earn more money and make new friends.
- Using your skills and abilities can boost your confidence and self-esteem.
- Studies show that people who work tend to enjoy happier and healthier lives than those who are not working. (Source: [Is work good for your health and well-being?](#))

### You can choose to be part of the workforce and to earn a living.

- You have unique skills and abilities. You can use those skills and abilities in a job you choose.
- You can learn new skills through training programs and through work.
- If you need them, there are supports to help you succeed at work.

### Employers need you.

- There is a worker shortage in Minnesota. Employers need your talents and skills.
- More employers are hiring people with disabilities because it is good for business. (Source: [Disability and Employment: The Business Case](#))

## What about my concerns?

### Unsure about going to work?

- If you haven't worked in the community or a competitive job, you might wonder: What if I can't find a job? How will I get to work? What if I start working and my health declines? How will working affect my benefits or my daily life? These concerns are normal.
- Share your concerns with the people who support you — such as your family, case manager, teacher or service provider. You can talk with staff at Disability Hub MN. Visit [www.disabilityhubmn.org](http://www.disabilityhubmn.org) or call 1-866-333-2466.

### Worried about losing your benefits?

- Work and benefits can go together to support your goals.
- All of Minnesota's public assistance and health care programs support work.
- You might be able to get better benefits when you work.
- You can talk with staff at Disability Hub MN to learn how to make sure you're better off when you work. Visit [www.disabilityhubmn.org](http://www.disabilityhubmn.org) or call 1-866-333-2466.

### **Wonder if you have the right skills?**

- Everyone has skills. Figuring out the right job and supports to match your skills is important.
- You may want to develop new skills. Whether you enroll in a college program, attend workshops or get on-the-job training, you can develop new skills your whole life.
- If you need them, there are services and supports to help you develop new skills.

### **Think you won't have a voice in the process?**

- Your voice is important. Use it! This starts with telling the people who support you — like your family, case manager, teacher or service provider — what you want.
- You can explore jobs that you might like. If you don't know what you'd like to do, there are services that can help you explore your options.
- If you earn less than minimum wage, someone from a Center for Independent Living will ask what you want to do at least once a year, including whether you want to work in the community.

### **Afraid you'll lose friends if you get a job?**

- Choosing to change jobs doesn't mean that you'll lose your friends.
- If you have friends from a day center or other settings, you can spend time with them when you're not working.
- Having a job in the community can help you make new friends.

### **Uncomfortable with the risks?**

- Having a job you love can involve taking some risks.
- Sometimes a job may end or change.
- To feel more comfortable, make a back-up plan with your family, case manager, teacher or service provider — so that if a job does change, you'll know your options.

## **What are my next steps?**

### **Think about what kind of work you'd like to do.**

- What activities do you enjoy? What interests you? How much money do you need to make? How many hours a week would you like to work?
- Your family, case manager or service provider can help you find work that matches your strengths and interests.
- Check out jobs that seem interesting, talk to others who are working, and maybe even gain some skills by trying out a job.

**Learn about specific jobs.**

- Share your work ideas with your family and others who support you.
- As you discuss your interests with more people, you'll learn about different types of work.
- You may even find out about ways to get experience through internships, volunteering, job shadowing or mentoring.

**Explore employment options in the community.**

- Talk to friends or family about where they work and what they like about it, or ask your case manager to take you to different employers to talk to people who work there. This is called an "informational interview."
- Check out resources such as Disability Hub MN. Visit [www.disabilityhubmn.org](http://www.disabilityhubmn.org) or call 1-866-333-2466.

# Key messages for guardians and families

## Why the focus on employment in the community?

### **Employment in the community is an option and a right.**

- We're in the midst of a national movement that supports competitive, integrated employment for all working-age people with disabilities.
- The expectation is that people with disabilities will be offered every opportunity to work and earn a competitive wage (minimum wage or higher) — and to have the supports they need to be successful.
- If they choose, people with disabilities can and should participate in the general workforce.

### **Job training and support are increasingly available.**

Supports such as ongoing job coaching and skills training allow employees and job seekers with disabilities to:

- Learn job skills through activities such as informational interviews, mentoring or internships
- Find work that matches their strengths and interests through customized employment — developing a job for the person rather than fitting the person into a job
- Develop natural supports in the workplace, such as getting help from co-workers or asking for extra time for certain tasks

### **Benefits now support work.**

- All of Minnesota's public assistance and health care programs support work.
- People with disabilities are often better off financially when they work in the community than when they rely on public benefits alone or work in a separate setting just for people with disabilities.
- Tools are available to help people make sure they're better off when they work, even if their benefits change. For details, talk with a benefits planning expert at Disability Hub MN. Visit [www.disabilityhubmn.org](http://www.disabilityhubmn.org) or call 1-866-333-2466.

## What about my concerns?

### **Worried that a job — or the right job — will be hard to find?**

- While it may not be easy to find a job right away, there are supports to help people with disabilities find jobs in the community.
- Some jobs require little or no experience, and the first job won't likely be the last.
- People often need to try more than one job to find the right fit.

### **Wonder about the rest of the day if the job is part-time?**

- People often need to try out different types of jobs and working hours.

- People working part-time may have opportunities for other activities in the community, at home or through services such as a day training and habilitation program.

### **Unsure about the options if the job ends?**

- If someone isn't successful in a particular job, there are services and supports to help explore other options.
- People who receive services through a Medicaid home and community-based waiver may be able to return to a day training and habilitation program or find other daytime activities.

### **Afraid the job will interfere with friendships?**

- People tend to report greater social connections when working in the community.
- Encourage the person to schedule activities with old friends outside of work hours — and to make new friends at work.

## **What are my next steps?**

### **Set an expectation of work early on.**

- Young people who get early work experience are far more likely to have jobs as adults.
- Start work conversations early. Talk about the good things that come with working in the community, such as making more money, meeting new friends and being able to do new things.
- Share your own positive experiences about work.
- Remind the person that everyone has times when they can — and can't — work, and that a person's first job isn't usually his or her last job.

### **Be enthusiastic about work.**

- Do more than talk about work. Seek opportunities to help the person learn work skills, such as volunteering and service learning.
- People with disabilities are often excited about working. Share in the excitement!

### **Support efforts to find — and keep — competitive work.**

- Talk about the things the person enjoys and does well.
- Use your personal and family relationships to explore work opportunities.
- Set up informational interviews or job shadowing.
- Look for volunteer positions, internships or mentoring opportunities.
- Check out resources such as Disability Hub MN. Visit [www.disabilityhubmn.org](http://www.disabilityhubmn.org) or call 1-866-333-2466.

# Key messages for support professionals

(vocational rehabilitation counselors/school counselors/case managers)

## Why the focus on competitive integrated employment?

### Minnesota is an Employment First state.

- We're in the midst of a national movement that prioritizes competitive, integrated employment as the preferred outcome for all people with disabilities.
- Known as Employment First, the movement sets employment as the next stage in the civil rights of people with disabilities.
- Simply put, people with disabilities want to work. They want to be treated the same as everyone else, including having the opportunity to earn competitive wages and pursue careers in the community.
- The expectation is that people with disabilities will be offered every opportunity to work and earn a competitive wage (minimum wage or higher) — and to have the supports they need to be successful.
- If they choose, people with disabilities can and should participate in the general workforce.

### Minnesota's workforce is changing.

- As baby boomers retire in record numbers, workers are in demand.
- The talents of all Minnesotans — including people with disabilities — are needed to fill these employment gaps.

### Expectations are changing.

- People with disabilities are increasingly interested in community-based employment.
- This change is supported by new employment laws and requirements — such as the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) rule, the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) and Minnesota's Olmstead Plan — which make it clear that segregated settings meant only for people with disabilities are no longer the first option for work.

## What about my concerns?

### Afraid the people you support can't work?

- Your belief that people with disabilities can work is a first but critical step.
- Many people with significant disabilities have successful jobs in the community.
- Rather than establishing limits, encourage the people you support to try community employment — and take steps to overcome barriers one by one.
- With the right supports, most people who want to work *can* work.
- Frame any setbacks or obstacles as learning opportunities rather than failures.

### Unsure how to apply informed choice to employment?

- Your role is to give the people you support the information and experiences they need to make informed decisions about work — such as how work might impact benefits or quality of life.
- Informed choice allows you to focus on the unique interests, preferences, contributions and needs of the people you support.
- Informed choice about employment means that a person:
  - Understands all of his or her options
  - Understands methods to overcome barriers
  - Knows the potential risks and benefits of decisions
  - Does not have his or her options limited
  - Is able to explore community resources
- Learn more with the Disability Hub MN [Informed Choice Toolkit](#).

### **Worried you don't know how to provide employment support?**

- Talk to your supervisor and colleagues about ways to develop these skills.
- Take advantage of helpful resources, such as the Disability Hub MN [Informed Choice Toolkit](#), [Disability Benefits 101](#) and [Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#). These resources offer tools and information to help the people you support achieve the goal of competitive, integrated work.

### **Concerned that supporting employment will mean more meetings and more paperwork?**

- While encouraging employment for the people you support will likely mean more person-centered planning, it doesn't need to overwhelm you or your staff.
- Competitive, integrated employment can facilitate independence, financial well-being and a higher quality of life.
- Partner organizations — such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services, schools and service providers — can help provide the supports needed for successful employment.

## **What are my next steps?**

### **Encourage the people you support to consider competitive, integrated employment as a goal.**

- Make it a priority to move away from segregated jobs that pay subminimum wage to jobs that are part of the community.
- As the people you support tell you they want to work, help them access the best services to reach those goals — including services and supports for daytime activities other than work.

### **Be enthusiastic about work.**

- People with disabilities are often excited about working. Share in the excitement!
- The expectations and language you use as a support professional can have a powerful effect on employment outcomes for the people you support.
- You can also do more than talk about work. Seek opportunities for the people you support to learn work skills, such as volunteering and service learning.

### **Create partnerships with other service providers.**

- Depending on the situation, these may include people such as community employment service providers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, county case managers and special education teachers.
- Work together to determine the steps each of you can take to help the people you support find — and maintain — community-based employment.

#### **Foster connections.**

- Many jobs happen because of personal connections. Learn about local employers and their workforce needs.
- Use your personal and professional relationships to explore jobs for the people you support — and look for ways to make new connections between the people you support and local employers who may have suitable opportunities.

#### **Learn about employment supports and services.**

- There are services to support people with disabilities who want to work.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Medicaid home and community-based services waivers offer support for many people.
- New employment services will be rolled out with the Medicaid home and community-based services waivers during 2018. To stay informed, visit the employment section of the [Community-Based Service Manual](#), provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.