

Employment: Supporting people with more significant disabilities

Lead Agency Employment Liaison Meeting

June 5, 2025

- Employment First and role of case manager
- Strategies for ensuring informed choice and talking with families
- Customized employment
- Liaison information and discussion

- Cole Sorensen, E1MN Coordinator
- Beth Grube, Benefits Planning Coordinator
- Kristy Howe, Employment First Lead
- Denise Paul, Office and Administrative Assistant Senior

A note on language

- Labels like “high support needs” or “significant disabilities” are often used, but they are not objective categories
- While these categories are not “real”, the impact these labels have is
- Our presentation will use these terms to refer to people who are least likely to be given control over their lives and included in the community because of how their disability is perceived

Employment First

- [Minnesota Employment First Policy](#) means raising the expectation that all working age Minnesotans with disabilities can work, want to work, and can achieve competitive integrated employment; and each person will be offered the opportunity to work and earn a competitive wage before being offered other supports and services.
- Three core values ground the Minnesota Employment First Policy. These core values reflect that people with disabilities, including people who have complex and significant disabilities:
 - Want to work
 - Can be competitively employed or self-employed, earning at least the minimum wage and benefits
 - Should be fully integrated physically, functionally and socially within the workplace

Your role as case manager

- Employment First approach
- Ensure informed choice
- Explain employment options (including customized employment)
- Authorize the corresponding service
- Monitor the service

Informed choice for people who don't communicate with words

- Access to communication supports is key, but this should not put employment on hold
- Experiential learning gives people a chance to communicate their preferences and opinions through body language and behavior
- Address [common concerns](#) proactively
- Families and supporters can give insight, but are not the only voice

Addressing family concerns

- Ask questions to understand what's behind the family's concerns
- Be clear on [roles](#), let the person's voice and perspective guide the conversation
- Visit the [Engage Families section](#) of the Youth in Transition Toolkit to learn about activating families in [preparing for employment](#) and more

Supported Employment vs Customized employment

- Supported Employment – a process to help people obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment in the open labor market, often with ongoing supports
- Customized Employment – a flexible, individualized process that involves negotiating job duties, schedules, or roles to match the strengths, needs, and interests of the job seeker with the specific needs of an employer

Customized Employment – 5 key elements

- **Discovery Process:** a personalized, strengths-based way of learning the person's interests, skills, ideal work conditions, and support needs. It replaces traditional assessments or application processes and focuses on real-life contexts and experiences.
- **Individualized Planning:** a person-centered employment plan is developed, using the discovery findings to outline goals, preferences, and support strategies. Transportation options and the effect of income on benefits are also included.

Customized Employment – 5 key elements

- **Employer Engagement:** building relationships with businesses and educating them about the benefits of customized employment. This involves identifying ways a candidate's skills can solve problems or improve operations for the employer.
- **Job Development and Negotiation:** matching the individual's strengths and interests to an employer's needs and negotiating job duties, schedules, or environments. The goal is to create a role that benefits both the employee and the employer, often through job carving or task reassignment.
- **Ongoing Support and Follow-Up:** support long-term success through tailored job coaching, assistive technology, workplace accommodations, and/or periodic check-ins. Supports can fade over time.



INFO FOR LIAISONS

Your role as liaison

- Employment First champion
 - Support informed choice in employment
 - Help people you support understand options
 - Replace old mindsets and biases
 - Understand and be able to explain/promote customized employment
- Support colleagues to do the same

Discussion:

- What strategies have you found helpful to do those things?
- How have you been able to challenge old mindsets/biases around who is “able” to work?

Announcements

- Next meeting: August 7th 10:00-11:00
- Office hours
- New invites for these meetings will be sent out
- Today's presentation recording will be uploaded to [Disability Hub MN - Training archive](#), link will be sent out soon

Thank You!