

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

- **TN Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS)** for comprehensive employment services, School to Work and Ticket to Work info, call for regional office numbers: 615-313-4714
- **Statewide Director of Day Services** for information regarding day services including supported employment. TN Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS): 1-800-535-9725
- **Benefits to Work Project** for SSI and SSDI assistance for individuals wanting to work or return to work: 1-888-839-5333
- **Client Assistance Program and Protection & Advocacy for Benefits of Social Security** for employment assistance & advocacy, Disability Law and Advocacy Coalition: 1-800-287-9636
- **TN ADA Leadership Network** for ADA info and advocacy, TN Disability Coalition: 1-888-643-7811
- **TN Technology Access Program** for resources for adaptive equipment and environmental accommodations: 1-800-732-5059
- **UT Center on Disability and Employment** for employment info and resources: 865-974-9400
- **Regional Day Service Coordinators** for local resources and information:
 - East TN - 423-787-6753 x107
 - Middle TN - 615-231-5028
 - West TN - 901-745-7661
- **Tennessee Family Pathfinder**, a website that lists many employment resources, www.familypathfinder.org, click on employment
- **ETTAC (East TN Technology Access Center)**, Knoxville for self-employment initiatives: 865-219-0130
- **Community Options**, Nashville for self-employment initiatives: 615-885-1099
- **Star Center**, Jackson for self-employment initiatives: 731-668-3888

DRS has agreements to work with school districts to help prepare students for work.

CHOOSING AN EMPLOYMENT PROVIDER

There are many agencies that provide supported employment. It is a good idea to choose a provider carefully. You may also ask for a new provider if you are not satisfied with services. These are some questions to ask when choosing an employment provider:

- What is the provider's experience working with individuals who have disabilities/health concerns similar to yours?
- How many employment personnel does the agency employ and how long have they been with the agency?
- What are the qualifications of the employment staff?
- What kind of jobs do people do who are supported by the agency and where do they work?
- How and how often does the agency communicate with the employer, the employee, and key support people? Can you have copies of written reports that have been sent to state agencies about your employment records?
- How does the agency provide transportation to work?
- How does the agency work with other team members such as a therapist, behavior analyst, or family members?
- In what ways does the agency market its Supported Employment Services?
- How does the agency assess customer satisfaction?
- Does the agency have a list of people who have used the employment program and who can talk to you about the services?

The Arc of Tennessee values diversity and does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender, or level of disability.



Wants You to Know... about Employment and Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



151 Athens Way, Suite 100
Nashville, TN 37228
1-800-835-7077
Voice: 615-248-5878
Fax: 615-248-5879
www.thearctn.org

THE VALUE OF WORK

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities benefit from working. With a job people increase their **income** and stimulate the **economy** of their communities. Through work people also develop **relationships** and gain **self-esteem**. They are not just in the community; they become part of the community.

However, most adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities do not work or work for low wages in segregated settings. Across the country few people with intellectual and developmental disabilities work in real jobs. The Arc of Tennessee hopes that this brochure will answer your questions about employment, provide helpful resources, and give you some tools to get started on the path to gainful employment.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST

The Arc of Tennessee and the Tennessee Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS) believe that the first "day service" option for adults should be employment. With appropriate supports:

- 1) every person can work regardless of his or her disability
- 2) every person who wants a job should be able to have one.

GETTING STARTED

Supported employment is a program to help people find jobs and teach them how to be successful at work. It also provides **supports** to keep someone employed. Supported employment is for individuals who need supports and who work in competitive and integrated work settings.

People who are already receiving supports from DMRS can ask for a "real job" to be a goal in their Individual Support Plans. The agency will then help refer the person to the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) for Supported Employment. Some agencies provide their own job supports. There are also many supported employment agencies. The

individual and the family can choose the employment provider that they want.

People who are not supported by DMRS must contact DRS themselves. For those who are eligible, DRS will assign a rehabilitation counselor and make a referral to an employment provider for job assistance. Typically DRS considers a job successful after 90 days of employment, and then job supports end. However, intensive supports can begin again if at any time a person is at risk of losing a job.

People may find a job that works for them without asking for formal employment supports. Some employers prefer to train their own employees instead of using an outside agency. Some are willing to make creative accommodations as needed.

DISCOVERY PROCESS

The Discovery Process is a procedure to help the person, their family, the job developer and the job coach to discover their skills, interests and abilities.

A thorough and constructive discovery process sets the stage for success. By spending quality time in the discovery process, a job developer will be able to get a good idea of the components that will help to ensure success on the job. By developing clear communication with the person and their circle of support, a job developer will be able to identify opportunities that meet the person's needs, wants and desires.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS ON THE JOB

Many individuals who work find that co-workers, supervisors, and other people in the community willingly provide assistance without any special training or pay. For example, Susie does not tell time so she needs help knowing when it is time for a break and time to return to work. Another employee watches the clock for her, providing the support she needs. A good job coach will look for and develop

these opportunities for integration and support and will gradually be needed less and less.

IMPAIRMENT RELATED WORK EXPENSE - SSI

If you need to pay for certain items or services in order to be able to work, you may be able to use the SSI Work Incentive (WI) called an Impairment-Related Work Expense (IRWE). The expense must, as its name implies, be related to your impairment and be needed in order to work. It can not be an expense that any similar worker without a disability would also have (such as purchase of a uniform, or bus fares if the bus is not specifically used for transporting you because of your disability).

If your SSA Claims Representative agrees that your claimed work expenses can be included in an IRWE, you may recover up to 50% of those expenses by having your SSI check increased up to its maximum amount. Exactly how much your SSI benefit may increase depends on your living situation, your earned and unearned income, and the amount of your IRWE.

TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Preparing to work should begin early. Students should develop a plan for moving from school to work by the time they are 16 years old. Parents and teachers can ask for help from DRS the year before graduation.

Continued on Reverse

This project is funded under an agreement with the State of Tennessee, the Division of Mental Retardation Services, the Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Council on Developmental Disabilities