

SD Department of Human Services
Division of Developmental Disabilities

PERSON CENTERED EMPLOYMENT PLANNING

A survey conducted by the SD Employment First Alliance
subcommittee for Person Centered Practices.

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Employment as an Expectation:

Feedback from self-advocates, families, and providers alike has identified that one of the major barriers to increasing the number of people in integrated work settings is because for many years, people with I/DD have not necessarily been expected to work. In recent years, focus has been placed on meaningful days and helping people find more of what's meaningful to them and work or employment have faded into the background for many as they pursue other interests and hobbies. While it is vital that all people have meaningful days and lives that are full and rich with experience, work cannot be overlooked as a key component to this. As adults we all seek to have full, meaningful lives and for many that includes having a job that provides us with income and thereby shelter, food, clothing, and the means to pursue our other hobbies and interests. For most people, our interests, hobbies, and dreams are achieved mostly due to our employment.

Through work, we also build social capital. An identified area of need across South Dakota and beyond has been to assist people to make real connections in their communities and create natural support networks. Employment is a natural place for these connections to begin. While at work, we get to know our colleagues, find common interests and build meaningful, reciprocal relationships. Making these connections is vital as we strive to find ways to support people to realize their dreams.

Living solely on the income received through Social Security benefits places the overall population of people with I/DD well below poverty level, making economic self-sufficiency very difficult to attain. Many people with I/DD do not rely on their wages to ensure housing, food, and clothing needs are met because they receive Social Security benefits, and as a result employment has been perceived as a "nice to have" rather than a necessity.

DDD and the SD Employment First Alliance recognize that work may be difficult to attain or may not be the highest priority for all persons with I/DD. In no way does DDD or the SD Employment First Alliance intend to mandate that all people must work. DDD has undertaken various efforts in the past year to assist in the culture shift to encourage more integrated work and our hope is that through revised funding mechanisms, education to self-advocates, family members, and providers that more people can realize their full potential through employment and provide guidance as to how teams can have more meaningful discussions about work and determine what's best for each person.

An expectation to work translates to an expectation that employment is presented as a high priority to working age adults and that they are provided with information about how work will impact their life, and that the conversation continues as people's lives shift and change.

Background:

The South Dakota Work Plan created as part of membership in the State Employment Leadership Network includes a goal for person centered planning. The SD Employment First Alliance subcommittee for Person Centered Practices has met several times to discuss how to best incorporate the PCT tools and skills into employment planning efforts while remaining mindful of the cultural shift that needs to take place regarding expectations for employment and how to best provide education and exposure to those participants who may determine that employment is not a priority for them. In an effort to determine how providers are incorporating Person Centered Thinking into employment planning efforts, a survey was created and sent to all Community Support Providers and SDDC on March 27, 2014.

Findings:

Providers were asked to describe current practices used to identify employment goals and supports for people supported and how those processes incorporate person centered practices. In addition, they were asked to note any successes and challenges experienced with the current process. Methods used to provide education to self-advocates and families were requested, as well as whether or not a guide for person centered employment planning would be beneficial and each organization's willingness to collaborate to develop a guide. Fifteen providers responded to the survey. Identified themes are as follows:

1. Please describe the process used to identify employment goals and supports for people supported.

Themes:

- All providers reported that the assessment process includes a vocational or employability assessment, Personal Outcome Measures, interest surveys, etc.
- Two providers currently use the Using Gifts to Build Connections exercise, or part of it to determine a person's strengths and existing connections within the community. Good Day/Bad Day was also listed specifically as a PCT tool that has been utilized.
- Several providers are offering employment classes within the organization and adapting the curriculum to those attending. Topics noted include: resume building, interviewing, professionalism, workplace safety.
- Vocational Rehabilitation was noted as a resource in the planning process.
- Most responses noted that goals and supports are identified through the annual planning process and special team meetings and employment may be included.

2. How does the process include person-centered practices?

Themes:

- Providers noted that in most cases, PCT tools deemed most pertinent to the participant are used during meetings and the assessment process.
- Several providers noted that they are currently making revisions to the processes to incorporate PCT.
- Two providers specifically mentioned that participant involvement and input is expected-ideas for jobs, identification of needed supports, etc.
- Important To/Important For was cited in many surveys as the basis for whether employment is identified as a priority.
- Other tools noted specifically include: What's Working, What's Not Working, Staff Matching, 4+1 Questions, Relationship Map, Learning Log.

3. What successes have you experienced using the current process?

Themes:

- Many providers noted that employment specific goals have been identified; job searches were able to begin.
- The Using Gifts tool has been helpful in identifying the connections a person has in his/her community and their areas of skill.
- People have been offered more work that is in line with personal preferences.
- Several providers noted an increase in community employment.

- Better job matches have occurred and in turn people have realized more independence, have been able to make purchases (vehicles, vacations) and found natural connections at work.
- One provider noted that using the matching tool has resulted in people maintaining their job and expressing content with their job.
- One organization noted that two staff members have been added, whose responsibility is to assist people to find jobs and prepare for work.
- One provider noted that the process has helped the organization as a whole “think outside the box” and has created more opportunities for people supported.
- Project Skills was noted as a useful resource in working with students in transition.

4. What challenges have you experienced using the current process?

Themes:

- A majority of providers noted that self-advocate and family member lack education, exposure, experience
 - What it means to be employed and to work-people have very little or no experience in the job market as an adult
 - Benefits planning
 - Deciding what type of work would suit them best
- Self-advocates’ motivation to work was a theme throughout all surveys, with specific comments made regarding:
 - Self-sabotage once on the job
 - People may not be willing to move from segregated services to employment in the community
 - Lack of follow through once on the job-performance, attendance, etc.
 - People may not be willing to work the schedules dictated by businesses in the community due to other interests such as Special Olympics, family functions, etc.
- Although an increase in integrated employment has been seen, several providers would like to see more progress in this area.
- It was noted that supervision requirements may hinder the times and places people can have jobs.
- Employer resistance and involvement from the community was cited as a barrier by multiple respondents.
- Some responses noted gaps in the organization’s process itself
 - A good job-person match is not always found
 - The process results in the teaching of generic employment skills (punctuality, attendance) rather than attaining jobs or employment.
 - People supported may tell the team they want a job, but their actions tell us otherwise once they are on the job.
- Two providers noted that a challenge is long-term funding for job-coaching supports
- One provider noted that staff turnover can slow down the process, as well as lack of timely communication.

5. How is education provided to participants and families regarding the benefits of employment?

Themes:

- All those who responded noted that education is provided to families
 - In many instances, service coordinators are responsible for relaying information about employment to participants and families, and this mostly occurs during the annual meeting or as part of the annual meeting process.
 - Information is being provided at IEP meetings by some organizations
 - Vocational Rehabilitation counselors were noted as a resource and are sometimes invited to ISP meetings.
 - Exposure to employment is being incorporated into several organization's employment classes.
 - Some providers have enlisted assistance from Benefits Specialists.
 - One provider has developed a book that includes job duties as well as comments from local employers regarding needs and successes.

6. Would a guide for person centered employment planning be beneficial to your organization?

Themes:

- Of the fifteen respondents, all providers indicated that a guide would be beneficial

7. Would you be interested in collaborating with other providers and DDD to develop a guide?

Themes:

- Fourteen respondents stated that they would be willing to collaborate for guide development.

8. Do you have any additional comments?

Comments:

- We struggle with motivation to work. The fear (often unfounded) of losing entitlement benefits has created a culture of anti-employment for many.
- I think that as part of the assessment process, we need to be evaluating whether or not employment is something that is appropriate and/or desired for that person – without presenting it in a way that would be discouraging. While we may think everyone should be employed, that realistically may not be possible for everyone. So if the focus is for employment, one of the first questions we have to ask is – what has been tried in the past? Where have the successes been? And what are the things that have prevented meaningful employment.
- One of my concerns is that for so many years choice regarding employment, and many other things, has been the focus. Now, we're shifting back to making employment the focus. How do I bring my agency along with this shift? Is it so, just because I say it is? I worry about this and am not real sure on how to proceed.
- We look forward to seeing the results of this survey.
- We are excited about employment for all, but need more information on what to do with road blocks such as on-going staff support when that is no longer funded. We look forward to new information on how to make this work.
- We are working with the Self Directed Futures Project through the Center for Disabilities with Wendy Parent Johnson.

Conclusions:

- While providers are using person centered tools and skills in the annual planning process on a consistent basis, the use of the tools and skills for employment planning purposes varies depending on provider and participant.
- Providers have noted success with utilizing the Using Gifts to Build Connections tools; however, only two providers reported this. Exposure to the Using Gifts tool in SD has been limited.
- Several providers are holding employment classes and adapt the curriculum to those in attendance. Participants typically voluntarily sign up for these classes.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Benefits Specialists were noted as valuable resources in the employment planning process.
- Successes have been observed in better person-job matches, increased retention and satisfaction with jobs, and more natural connections being made.
- Challenges noted include long term funding for job coaching supports, motivation of people supported, and the level of education, experience, exposure that self-advocates and families have, as well as resistance from employers.
- While providers report an increase in integrated employment, some providers would like to see more progress in this area.
- Education regarding employment is typically provided to self-advocates and family members through the annual planning process and this responsibility would likely fall to the service coordinator.

Recommendations:

- Share information that demonstrates how PCT tools and skills can be used to enhance employment planning, with emphasis on job matching.
- Provide opportunity for providers to learn more about Using Gifts to Build Connections.
 - Determine the best method to share this information, such as at the SD PCT Gathering.
- Gather more information from providers conducting employment classes to identify similar topics and presentation styles to share with other interested providers.
 - Determine the best method to share the information, such as a webinar format.
- Provide additional information to providers regarding the MOU between the Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Developmental Disabilities that delineates services offered by each entity as well as funding streams.
- Develop an informational document regarding employment that service coordinators can share with self-advocates and family members.
- Enlist those interested in collaborating to create a person centered employment guide.